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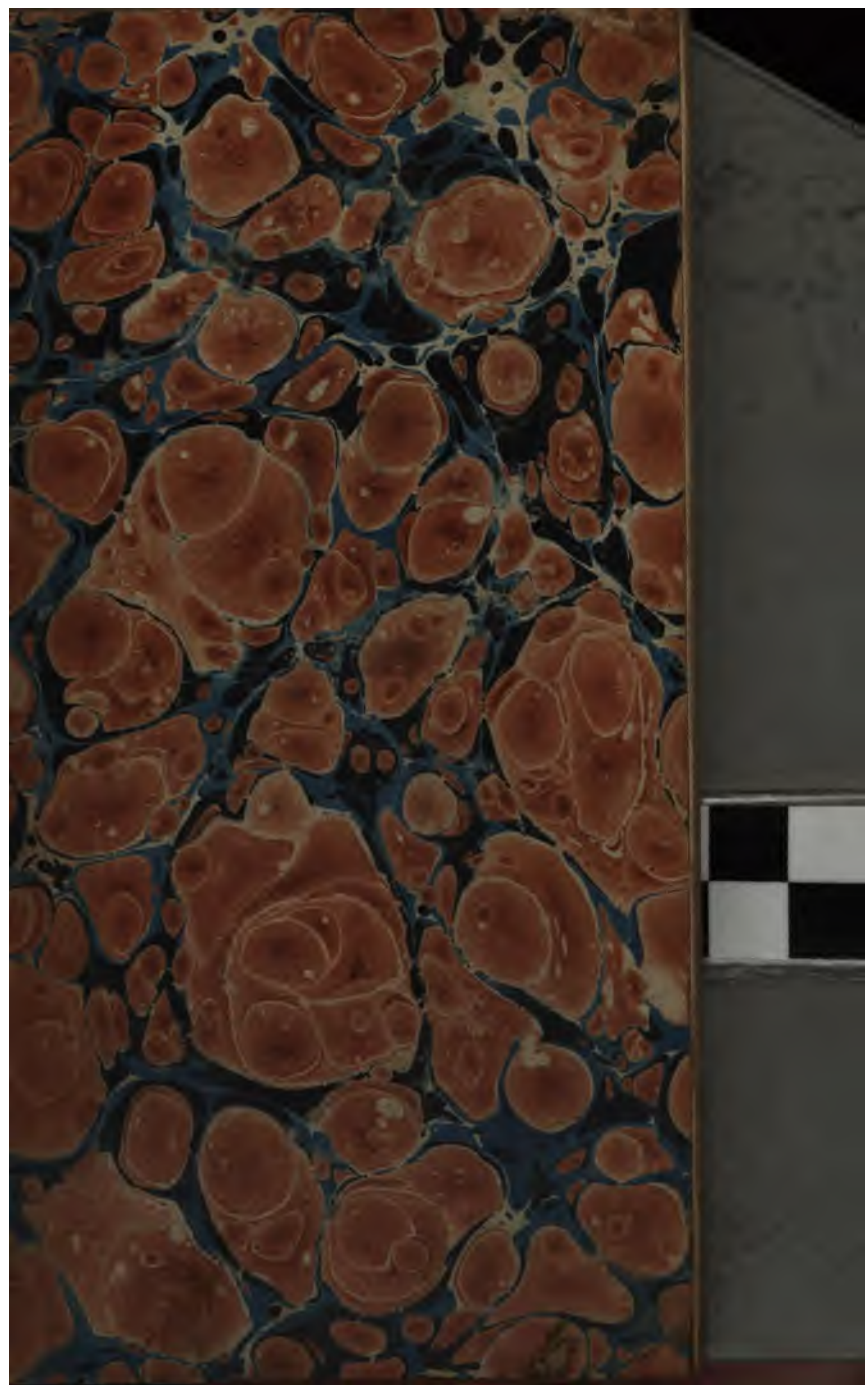
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A TREATISE
OF
DELIGHTING IN GOD;

FROM PSALM XXXVII. 4.

“ DELIGHT THYSELF IN THE LORD, AND HE SHALL
GIVE THEE THE DESIRES OF THINE HEART.”

[A PRACTICAL TREATISE ON THE LOVE OF GOD, AS CONNECTED WITH THE
HAPPINESS OF MAN.]

BY THE
REV. JOHN HOWE, M.A.

“ Howe seems to have understood the Gospel as well as any uninspired writer, and to have imbibed as much of its spirit. The truest sublime is to be found in his writings, and some of the strongest pathos.—He has a vast variety of uncommon thoughts; and, on the whole, is one of the most valuable writers in our language, and, I believe, in the world.”

DODDRIDGE.—*See his Second Lecture, On the Use and Character of Practical Writers.*

LONDON:
JAMES NISBET AND CO. BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCXXXIX.

447.



J. DENNETT, UNION BUILDINGS, LEATHER LANE.

NOTICE TO THE READER.

THE following Work, entitled *A Treatise of Delighting in God*, and which might perhaps be more properly entitled *A Practical Treatise on the Love of God, as connected with the Happiness of Man*, is intended as a companion to another work of the same Author, *On the Blessedness of the Righteous*, lately published in a similar form, and upon a similar plan. In this Edition, some extraneous matter, which encumbered the original work, has been omitted. Expressions, once familiar and in common use, but now become obsolete or vulgar, have been exchanged for others more appropriate, and of the correct modern stamp. Attention has also been paid to the punctuation and right division of sentences, from the want of which, in former Editions, it is sometimes difficult, without a second or third reading, to apprehend the true meaning of the writer. By these and some other slight altera-

tions, the Editor has endeavoured to present this excellent Work in a form the most suitable to modern Readers, and such as the Author himself might have approved.

London, May 1st, 1839.

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OF
DELIGHTING IN GOD.

Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of
thine heart.—Psalm xxxvii. 4.

PART I.

SHEWING THE IMPORT OF THIS PRECEPT.

CHAPTER I.

Meaning and Application of the Text. The Object, to be delighted in. Access to God by a Mediator. God considered in his Relation to us, as our Lord and Portion. The Sufficiency of this Portion: the Communicableness of it. Desires of the unregenerate Soul. Desires of the renewed Soul. Nature of the Communication, with reference to the Mediator. Revelation of God to the Soul. Effects of this Revelation upon the Soul.

THIS Psalm, by the contents of it, seems to suppose an afflicted state of good men, by the oppression of such as were wicked,—the prosperity of these wicked ones in their oppressive course,—an aptness in the oppressed to impatience under the evils they suffered,—a disposition to behold, with a lingering and envious eye, the good things which their oppressors enjoyed, and they themselves wanted. Hence the composition is agreeable to these suppositions, and

serviceable to the fortifying of the righteous against the sin and trouble, which such a state of things might occasion to them.

The verse cited has a more direct aspect on this last-mentioned thing, in the case of upright men suffering under the oppression of violent and prosperous wickedness, namely, that they might hereupon be apt to covet and envy the worldly delight of their enemies, to be desirous of their dainties, and grudge they should be theirs, who, they knew, deserved worse things,—while they themselves felt the pressure of worse, which at their hands they deserved not.

What is here offered to the consideration of the sufferers, tends aptly to allay their discontent, to check and repress their inordinate desire towards inferior things, or to divert and turn it another way: as if it had been said, “ You have no such cause to look with displeasure or immoderate desire upon their delicacies; you may have better: better belong to you, and invite you. The Lord himself is your portion. It becomes both your state and spirit to apply yourselves to a holy delight in him; to let your souls loose, and set them at liberty to satiate themselves with those undefiled and satisfying pleasures, to which you have a right, and in which you will find the loss and want of their meaner enjoyments abundantly made up to you. You have your natural desires and cravings, as well as other men; and those may be too apt to exceed their just bounds and measures. But if you take this course, they will soon become sober and

moderate, satisfied with what is competent, even with an indifferent allowance of the good things of this earth; and, towards the Lord,—let them be as vast and large as can be supposed,—they can never be larger than the rule will allow, nor than the object will satisfy; the direction and obligation of the former being indeed proportioned to the immense and boundless fulness of the latter.”

We need not operosely inquire, to what sort of persons this direction is given. It is plain, that it is the common duty of all to delight in God. But it cannot be the immediate duty of all. Men that know not God, and are enemies to him, have somewhat else to do first. They, to whom the precept is directly meant, are the regenerate, (the righteous and the upright, as the Psalm itself doth plainly design them,) his own people.

The most profitable way of considering these words, will be chiefly to insist on the direction given in the former part of the verse: and then to shew, towards the close, how the event promised in the latter part will, not only by virtue of the promise, but even naturally, follow thereupon.

The direction, in the former part, gives us a plain signification of God's good pleasure, that he himself would be the great object of his people's delight. It is his will, that they principally delight themselves in him.

Our discourse upon this subject will fall naturally into two parts: the former whereof will

relate to the import, the latter to the practice of the enjoined delighting in God.

That we may more distinctly open the import and meaning of delighting in God, it will be necessary that we treat, 1. Of the delectable object : 2. Of the delight to be taken therein.

1. As to the former, the general object of delight is some good. Here, it is the chief and best good, the highest and most perfect excellency : which goodness and excellency, considered as residing in God, give us a twofold notion or view of the object, whereupon this delight may have its exercise. 1. God may be looked upon in an absolute consideration, as he is in himself the best and most excellent Being ; in whom we behold the concurrence of all perfections, the most amiable and beauteous excellencies, to an intellectual eye, of which it can have any apprehension. 2. In a relative consideration, viz. as his goodness and excellency are considered, not merely as they are in himself, but also as having an aspect on his creatures. For, considering him as in himself the most excellent Being ; if here we give our thoughts liberty of exercising themselves, we shall soon find, that he must be considered also as the first being, the original and author of all other beings ; otherwise he were not the most excellent.

Besides the general relations which He bears to all, as the common Maker, Sustainer, and Disposer of them ;—observing that there are some which, by their reasonable natures, are capable of government by him (in the proper

sense, viz. by a law) and of blessedness in him, —to these we consider him as standing in a twofold reference, in both which we are to eye and act towards him, viz. as a Lord to be obeyed and a portion to be enjoyed, and have most delectable excellencies to take notice of in him, (which require that we should suitably comport with them,) answerable peculiarly to each of these considerations, in respect whereof we are to look upon him; 1. As the most excellent Lord, most delectably excellent; whom we cannot but esteem worthy of all possible honour and glory, that every knee bow to him, and every tongue confess to him, and that universal homage, subjection, and adoration be given to him for ever: 2. As the most excellent portion, in whom all things, that may render him such, concur and meet together,—all desirable and imaginable riches and fulness, together with large bounty and flowing goodness, every way correspondent to the wants and cravings of indigent and thirsty souls. The former notion of him intimates to us our obligation of duty to him: the latter prompts to an expectation of benefit from him.

But, now, because by the apostacy we have injured his right in us as our Lord, forfeited our own right in him as our portion, and lost our immediate capacity or disposition both to serve and enjoy him, this great breach between him and us was not otherwise to be made up but by a mediator; to which office and undertaking his own Son incarnate, the Word

made flesh, (he being only fit), was designed. By him, dealing between both the distanced parties, satisfying the justice of God, and overcoming the enmity of man, the difference (so far as the efficacy of his mediation doth extend) is composed; and, to the reconciled, God becomes again their acknowledged Lord and portion. His right is vindicated, theirs is restored; and both are established upon new grounds, added to those on which they stood before: so that, now, our actings towards God, and our expectations from him must be through the Mediator. Whereupon this object of our delight, considered relatively to us, is entirely God in Christ, being reconciled: we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.^a

In these several ways, that have been thus briefly mentioned, may God come under our consideration. Nor are they, any of them, inapplicable or impertinent to our purpose, when we would design him the object of our delight. Surely God, considered each of these ways, ought to be looked on by us as a most delectable object. For it is pleasant to contemplate him (even most absolutely considered) as the most excellent being, when we behold his glorious excellencies in themselves; that is, without the actual present consideration of any advantage, that may redound to us from them—as we are apt to find ourselves pleased and gratified in

^a Rom. v. 10, 11.

viewing an excellent object, (suppose a stately edifice or beautiful flower,) from which we expect no other benefit.

Again, if we consider him relatively, in the capacity of Lord, it is grateful to behold him decked with majesty, arrayed in glory, clothed with righteousness, armed with power, shining in holiness, and guiding himself with wisdom and counsel in all his administrations: and it is delightful to obey him, while we are most fully satisfied of his unexceptionable right to command us. For there is a great pleasure, naturally arising to a well-tempered spirit, from the apprehended fitness of things, as, that he should command, and that we should obey; his right, and our obligation, being so undoubtedly clear and great: especially, when we also consider what he commands, and find it is no hard bondage,—that they are not grievous commands, which he requires us to be subject to, but such in the keeping whereof there is great reward, and that his ways are all pleasantness and peace. And if we consider him as a portion, the matter is plain. So rich and abounding fulness, where also there is so communicative an inclination, cannot but recommend him as a most satisfying object of delight.

Thus we are principally to consider him, viz. rather relatively than absolutely, and that relation as now anew settled in Christ. And so, though it be very delightful to look upon him, as one that may and is ready to become related to us, (as he is to any, that will

consent and agree with him upon the Mediator's terms,) yet it adds unspeakably to the pleasantness of this object, when we can reflect upon such characters in ourselves, that we may thence regularly conclude, he is thus actually related unto us, that is, that we have consented; that our relation to him immediately arises from the covenant of life and peace; that he hath entered into covenant with us, and so we are become his.

It is pleasant thus to behold and serve him as our Lord. How great is the emphasis of these words, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus *my Lord!*" To consider not only how well he deserves the acknowledgments and subjection of all, but also to find ourselves under the chosen and gentle bonds of perpetual service and devotedness to him, is certainly matter of very high delight and pleasure. But how infinitely delightful is it, to view and enjoy him as our portion! This seems very pertinent to the design of this Scripture, which, aiming to recall and draw in the hearts of godly persons from too earnest and envious lingerings after the enjoyments of worldly men, propounds what may be an over-balance to the imagined felicity of their state, and wherein they should more than equal them in point of enjoyment.

And should we single out this, as the object to be considered, (namely, God as a portion,) we should have two things to take notice of, that would render it most delectable, and wherein holy

hearts may acquiesce, and rest with fullest satisfaction : the sufficiency of it, the communicableness of it.

1. The sufficiency of it. This cannot but be every way complete and full ; it being the all-comprehensive good, which is this portion : God all-sufficient !—the most eminent and known attributes of his being, so far as they can be communicated, having an ingrediency and concurrence in the happiness of his people therein.

2. The communicableness thereof. This proceeds from his bounty more peculiarly, and from his gracious inclination to do good and to make his boundless fulness overflow to the replenishing of thirsty longing souls, whom first it had allured, and caused so to long. But though the scope and order of the discourse in this Psalm did not directly seem to import more than a design of calling off the persons, here spoken of, from one sort of enjoyment to another, from a meaner and more empty to a better ; yet it is to be considered, that the best and true enjoyment cannot be unaccompanied with duty, and that God is not otherwise to be enjoyed, than as he is obeyed ; nor indeed are the notions of him as a Lord to be obeyed, and as a good to be enjoyed, entirely distinct, but are interwoven, and run into one another. We obey him, even in enjoying him ; it being part of our enjoined duty to set our hearts upon him, as our best and highest good. And we enjoy him in obeying him ; the advantage and benefit of his government being a real and most momentous part of

that good, which we enjoy from him and in him. He is our benefactor, even as he is our ruler; and is therein our ruler, as he proposes to us benefits, which he thereby binds us to accept; for even his invitations and offers are laws and formal bonds of duty upon us. Even the act of delight itself, pitched upon him, is an act of homage.

Wherefore it will be fit to steer a larger course, than merely to consider him as a good commensurate to our partial appetites, which are apt to limit our apprehensions to this or that particular sort of good, and tincture them with a notion of delight, which, if it be not false and grossly carnal, may yet be much too narrow and unproportionable to the universal all-comprehending good. And though we shall not here go beyond the compass of delectable good, yet as there is no good (truly so called) which is not in or from the first goodness, so neither is there any capable of being gathered up into that sum, which is not delectable.

That we may here with the more advantage state the delectable good we are now to consider, it will be requisite to premise two things.

First, that all delightful enjoyment of God supposes some communication from him. Nothing can delight us, or be enjoyed by us, whereof we do not, in some way, or by some faculty or other, partake somewhat,—either by our external sense, sensitive appetite, fancy, memory, mind, will,—and either in a higher or lower degree, for a longer or a shorter time, according as the delight is for kind, degree, or continuance. This is

plain in itself. And in the present case, therefore, of delighting in God or enjoying him, some communication or participation there must be, one way or other, according as is the enjoyment of him. It is necessary, that with the clearest and most penetrative light and power God come in upon the mind and heart, scatter darkness, remove prejudice, abolish former relishes, transfuse his own sweet savour through the soul. Proportionably to what is to be done, he communicates himself, as the event constantly shews, with all them that are ever brought to any real enjoyment of him. For we plainly see, that the same divine communication, which delights and satisfies, also procures that it may be desired and received; makes its own way, attempers and frames the soul to itself, and gives it the sweet relish and savour thereof, wherein God is actually enjoyed.

Secondly, That however God himself is truly said to be enjoyed or delighted in by holy souls, yet this communication is also a sort of mediate object of this delight or enjoyment.

These things being premised, it is now needful to inquire somewhat more distinctly, what that communication or communicable good is, which is the immediate matter of proper spiritual enjoyment to holy men in this world: for many have that phrase of speech, "enjoying God," often in their mouths, who do not understand what they mean by it; some even, who have real enjoyment of him,—to whom, though they

possibly taste the thing which they cannot express or form distinct conceptions of, it might be somewhat to their advantage to have it more clear to their apprehension, what it is that they immediately enjoy, when they are said to enjoy God, or by what he is to be enjoyed.

It is not a mere fancy (as too many profanely think, and are too apt to speak) that is the thing to be enjoyed. There have been those, who, comparing their own experience with God's promises and precepts, (the rule, by which men are to expect his gracious influence,) were capable of avowing it, rationally, to be some very substantial thing that they have enjoyed:—the sobriety of their spirits, the regularity of their workings, their gracious composure, the meekness, humility, denial of self, the sensible refreshing, the mighty strength and vigour which hath accompanied such enjoyments, sufficiently proving to them that they did not hug an empty cloud, or embrace a shadow, under the name of enjoying God. Such expressions, as we find in the Book of Psalms (the sixteenth and many others), with sundry parts of Scripture besides, leave us not without instance,—expressions, that import nothing like flashy and flaunting bombast, no appearance of affectation, no pompous show of vain glory, no semblance of swelling words of vanity, but which discover a most equal, orderly, well-poised temper of mind, in conjunction with the highest delight and well-pleasedness in God. That rich and inimitable fulness of living sense

could not but be from the apprehension of a most excellent nature and kind, whatsoever be the notion that may be most fitly put upon it.

Nor yet is it the mere essence of God which men can be said to enjoy; for that is not communicated nor communicable. Enjoyment supposes possession. But it would be a strange language, to say we possess the essence of God otherwise than relatively; which is not enough for actual enjoyment. His mere essential presence is not enough. That renders him not enjoyed by any, for that is equally with all and every where; but all cannot be said to enjoy him. As therefore it is a real, so there must be some special communication, by which, being received, we are truly said to enjoy him. A special good it must be, not such as is common to all, (for there is a communication from him that is of that extent, in as much as all live and move and have their being in him, and the whole earth is full of his goodness.) This is a good peculiar to them that are born of God, and suited to the apprehension and sense of that divine creature, which is so born.

What this good is, how fully sufficient it is, and how it is communicable, may be the better understood, when we have considered what are the wants and cravings of this creature, or of them in whom it is formed and wrought. For when we have pitched upon the very thing itself, which they most desire, we shall then understand it to be both what will be sufficient to

satisfy, and what may be communicated for that purpose.

But now, before that new birth take place in the spirit of man, it wants, but knows not what, craves indeterminately (who will shew us any good?), not fixing upon any particular good that is sufficient and finite, and labouring under an ignorance of the infinite, together with a disaffection thereunto. Its wants and cravings are beyond the measure of all finite good; for suppose it to have never so large a share, nay, could it grasp and engross the whole of it, an unsatisfiedness and desire of more would still remain: but that more is somewhat indeterminate and merely imaginary, an infinite nothing, an idol of fancy, a god of its own making. God it must have; but what a one he is, it misapprehends, and, wherein it rightly apprehends him, likes and loves him not, will by no means choose, desire, or take complacency in him. So that an unregenerate soul is, while it is such, necessarily doomed to be miserable. It cannot be happy in any inferior good; and in the supreme, it will not. What the real wants and just cravings of a man's spirit therefore are, is not to be understood by considering it in that state. And if the work of the new creature were perfected in it, it would want and crave no more, but would be satisfied fully, and at perfect rest.

Those wants of the spirit are best to be discerned in the state, wherein that work of the new birth is begun and hitherto unfinished; in

which state it desires rightly, and still continues to desire; a state of intermingled motion and rest, wherein delight is imperfect, and allayed by the continual mixture of yet unsatisfied desire.

Now let it be inquired of such a one, what that thing is. We are generally told there, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord,"^a &c. And it may be, many would more shortly tell you, it is God they desire; whence it would only be concluded, it is God they aim to enjoy or delight in. But because this brings us but where we were, let it be further inquired, "What then is your business with God, or what would you have of him?" It is not, surely, to be God that you expect or seek, or to enjoy God in that sense wherein he possesses and enjoys himself. No, not by any means. It is then some communication from God, different from what all men have, which they desire and crave. And what is that? It is somewhat, as possible to be apprehended, and as distinguishable both from his incommunicable being, and his so generally communicated bounty towards all, as if the inquiry were, What it is that I desire really to enjoy, when I desire to enjoy a friend? It is neither to desire the impossible thing, of possessing his being as my own; nor the unsatisfying thing, the mere partaking some part of his external goods and

^a Ps. xxvii. 4.

wealth, whereof, it may be, he daily imparts somewhat to every beggar at his door. But it is to have his intimate acquaintance, his counsel and advice, the advantage of improving myself by his converse, and of conforming myself to his example in his imitable perfections, the assurances of his faithful constant love and friendship in reference to all future emergencies. A friend is really to be enjoyed in such things as these. And in like manner is God to be enjoyed also; but with this difference, that God's communications are more immediate, more constant, more powerful and efficacious, infinitely more delightful and satisfying, in respect both of the good communicated and the way of communication.

In short, then, the wants and desires of a renewed soul, the supply and satisfaction whereof it seeks from God, would be summed up in these things: that it may know him more fully, or have clearer apprehensions of him; that it may become like to him, and be framed more perfectly after his own holy image.

The divine communication, or that which is communicated from God to regenerate souls, wherein they are to delight themselves, contains in it an inwardly enlightening revelation of himself to them, that they may know him more distinctly. This is a part of the one thing, which would be so highly satisfying and delightful: "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us."^a When

^a John xiv. 8.

their desires are towards God only, it is with this aim in the first place, *that they may know him*, “We shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord:”^a as if it had been said, This is a thing not doubted of but taken for granted, that *we would fain know the Lord*. It is a dictate of pure and primitive nature, to covet the knowledge of our own original, the knowledge of him from whom we and all things sprang. Men are herein become most unnaturally wicked, when they like not to retain God in their knowledge.^b

The new and divine nature once imparted, that is, primitive nature renewed and restored to itself, revives the desire of this knowledge, and hath this inclination ingrafted into it, to know him (as he is now only to be comfortably known) in the Mediator. “I determined to know nothing among you (saith St. Paul) but Jesus Christ,”^c &c. i. e. to glory in, to discover myself taken with, no other knowledge than this, or with none so much as this: to which purpose, he elsewhere professes to count all things loss for the excellency of this knowledge,^d—so vehemently did desire work this way. And proportionably as it is apprehended desirable, must it be esteemed delightful also. Nor are we here to think, that this desired knowledge was intended finally to terminate in the Mediator; for that the very notion of mediator resists. The name *Christ* is the proper name of that office, and the

^a Hosea vi. 3.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^b Rom. i. 18.

^d Phil. iii. 8.

desire of knowing him under that name imports a desire to know him in his office ; viz. as one that is to lead us to God, and restore our acquaintance with him, which was not to be recovered upon other terms. So that it is ultimately the knowledge of God, that is the thing so much desired, and the knowledge of Christ, as the way and our conductor to God : that is, the knowledge of God not absolutely considered alone, (though he is, even so, a very delectable object,) but as he is related to us, and from whom we have great expectations, our all being comprehended in him.

It cannot but be very delightful to have him before our eyes represented and revealed to us, as the all-comprehending good, which may become our portion. He is, some way, to be enjoyed, even in this view. It is a thing apt to infer complacency and delight, thus to look upon him. They who place felicity in contemplation, especially in the contemplation of God, are not beside the mark, if they do not circumscribe and confine it there, so as to make it stand in mere contemplation, or in an idle and vainly curious view of so glorious an object, without any further concern about it. They will then be found to speak very agreeably to the language of Holy Scripture, which so frequently expresses the blessedness of the other state by *seeing God*. And if the act of vision be delicious, the representation of the object must have proportionable matter of delight in it. It cannot but be so, if we consider the nature of this

representation; which, answerably to the sensible want and desire of such as shall be delighted therewith, must have somewhat more in it than the common appearances of God, which offer themselves equally to the view of all men. That it has more in it, is evident from God's own way of speaking of it: for we find, that his revealing himself in this delectable way is attributed to the Spirit,^a and as a work to be done by it, when it shall be given. The Spirit is prayed for to those, of whom it is said that after they believed they were sealed by the spirit of promise: "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."^b (It is here mentioned by a name and title proper to the end and purpose, for which it is desired to be given to them, viz. "the spirit of wisdom and revelation," that end and purpose being immediately expressed in the knowledge of him; "the eyes of their understanding being enlightened"^c by it for the same purpose.) By which prayer it is supposed a communicable thing, and that these had, in some way, a right to the communication of it, or that it was a thing proper to their state, and fit to be prayed for as some way belonging to them, they being in a more immediate capacity of such revelation than others. But how incongruous had it been, with such solemnity of address to make request on their behalf, for that which they already sufficiently had as a thing common to all men.

^a Eph. i. 17.

^b Ver. 17.

^c Ver. 18.

It is spoken of as a reward of their former love, loyalty, and obedience. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."^a Therefore is such manifestation no more to be accounted common, than the love of Christ is, or the keeping of his commandments.

What it hath more than common light, external or internal, answerable to the deeply felt wants, and to the heart's desires of the regenerate, by which it becomes so highly pleasant and delectable to them, (though it is rather to be felt than told,) may yet in some degree be understood by such characters as these.

First, It is much more distinct and clear. They are confused and dark glimmerings, which other men have of the blessed God, so that the light which is in them is darkness.^b It is true, that an unregenerate person may possibly have clearer acquired notions of God and of the things of God, than those notions of the same kind may be in some who are regenerate; so that, by the advantages he may have in respect of better natural abilities, more liberal education, or circumstances of his condition which may more engage him to study and contemplation, he may be capable of making fuller discoveries and more evident deductions, and be able to discourse thence more rationally and more satisfy-

^a John xiv. 21.

^b Matt. vi. 23.

ingly to others, even concerning God, his nature, his attributes and works, than some very pious persons, destitute of those advantages, may be able to do. But these, though their candle give a dimmer light than the others, have the beams of a sun raying in upon them, that much outshines the other's candle. And though they know not so many things, nor discern the connexions of things so thoroughly, yet, as they know what is most necessary to be known, so, what they know, they know better, and with a more excellent sort of knowledge,—proportionably, as whatsoever is originally and immediately divine, cannot but much excel that which is merely human. Those do but blunder in the dark : these, in God's own light, see light ; and his light puts a brighter hue and aspect upon the same things, than any other representation can put upon them. How bright and glorious things are divine wisdom, love, holiness, to an enlightened mind !

The beauty of the truths, which relate to God, is more clearly apprehended by an understanding divinely enlightened. It is most delightful to behold their lively sparkling lustre, by which they appear so amiable and lovely to a well-tempered spirit, as to transport it with pleasure, and ravish it from itself into union with them. There was somewhat else apprehensible, no doubt, and apprehended by them, the inward sentiments of whose souls those words so defectively served to express, “ Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods, who is like thee, glorious in holiness,” besides the

mere truth of any proposition, into which those words can be resolved. And join those, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God," &c. And those, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that," &c. Or those, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, whereof I am chief." Or the strains of that rapturous prayer, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

The tendency of such truths is much more clearly conceivable to a holy soul, than to another—what their scope or aspect is,—which way they look,—what they lead to,—what design God hath upon us in revealing them,—and what impression they ought to make upon us. To the ignorance or disregard of the tendency and design of God's revelation, it is to be attributed, that many have long the same notions of things hovering in their minds, without ever reflecting, with displeasure, upon the unsuitable temper of their spirits thereto. It may be, they know things concerning God, the tendency whereof is to draw their hearts into union with

him, to transform them into his likeness, to inflame them with his love: but they still remain, notwithstanding, at the greatest distance, averse, coldly affected towards him, and utterly disaffected.

There is, then, somewhat to be apprehended by God's representation of himself to the minds of this regenerate people, at least more clearly than by other men. Hence the work of regenerating or converting them is expressed by *opening their eyes*.^a For the divine communication makes its own way, and enters at the soul's seeing faculty, which it finds (as "opening the eyes" imports,) and does not now create. But finding it vitiated, and, as to any right seeing of God, shut and closed up, it heals, opens, and restores it as it enters. It is expressed, by turning them "from darkness to light," and "from the power of Satan, who had blinded their eyes, unto God." This implies, that their eyes were so distempered, that, though they could see other things, God they could not see; and that he was invisible to their intellectual as well as their bodily eyes. Hence is that *understanding*, by which we know God, said to be *given*; which implies it to be somewhat superadded to the whole natural being and powers of the human soul in its present corrupted state: "He hath given us an understanding to know him that is true."^b The same renewing work is also said to be "a calling of men out of darkness into his marvellous light:"^c—as if they were brought by it into a new world,

^a Acts xxvi. 18.^b 1 John v. 20.^c 1 Pet. 2. 9.

wherein they found themselves beset with wonders, and all things were surprising to them. To this purpose is that prayer of the Psalmist, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."^a He supposed many undiscovered wonders, which more open eyes might yet behold in that external revelation of God's mind, which was then afforded, (and was wont in those days to go under the name of his *law*, though it contained histories, prophecies, and promises, as well as precepts.) He was no stranger to those records, nor had little insight into them, yet he felt a need of more light and better eyes, which he therefore desires:—not that God would cause a new revelation to be written, but that he might learn more out of that already extant, and that the wonderful things, contained in it, might be made more clear to him. Nor can we suppose him, herein, to desire to be gratified and delighted by the communication of a thing incommunicable.

Secondly, This representation of God is also more powerfully assuring, and such as is apt to beget a more certain operative belief of the things revealed; that is, being added to the means of faith, which men may be supposed to have had before, it adds much to their assurance of the same things, so as to make it efficacious upon their spirits, and as well cures the doubtfulness, irresolution, and waywardness of their minds and hearts, as their confusion and darkness.

Some have the word of faith without the spirit

^a Ps. cxix. 18.

of faith. The faith, therefore, which they have, is a carcass; not only a weak but a dead thing, and which hath no power at all to determine the soul, and compose it to that delightful rest, which such things, duly believed, would certainly produce. The most delectable truths of God, and such as most directly tend, in this apostate lapsed state of man, to give us the sweet and refreshing relishes of a just and rational joy and pleasure, are such as are contained in the gospel of Christ, —the things that concern our reconciliation friendship and communion with God in him, and which are, therefore, wholly of immediately divine and supernatural revelation, and to be received by faith. One apostle prays for some, that they might be filled with joy and peace in believing :^a another says of others, that “believing they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” The external revelation in the gospel is an apt means to beget that faith, which, it is said, comes by hearing : but the very notion of means, importing what intervenes between the effect and the principal agent, necessarily supposes such an agent, and that what is only means cannot work the effect alone. That agent, viz. God himself, or the Spirit, besides the means which he uses and makes effectual, must have his own influence, whereby he makes them so. If a pen be a fit means or instrument to write with, it does not therefore follow, that it can write alone, without a hand to move and guide

^a Rom. xv. 3.

it,—in order whereto a motive and directive influence is imparted. In the present case, the influence is the inward enlightening overpowering communication, whereof we speak; the efficacy whereof is such, as to give the soul that peaceful rest in believing, which is also most pleasant and delightful, according as the things are found to be so, which are believed.

CHAPTER II.

The Effect of the Revelation of God upon the Soul treated of more particularly. Its Effect in transforming the Soul, in delighting the Soul, in impressing upon it the Image of God, in producing Conformity to God. The Gospel the proper Instrument of Conformity to God. Delight arising from this Conformity.

FAITH is a part of the homage paid to the authority of the great God; which is to be estimated sincere, according as it answers the end, for which the things, to be believed, were revealed. That end is not to beget only the notion of those things as truths, that are to be lodged in the mind and go no further—as if they were to be understood true, only that they might be so understood—but that the person might accordingly have his spirit formed, and shape the course of his whole conversation. Therefore is it called the obedience of faith; and the same word, which is wont to be rendered unbelief, signifies disobedience, obstinacy, unpersuadableness. So that this homage is then truly given to the eternal God, when his revelation is com-

plied with and submitted to, according to its true intent and purpose: which, that it may be, requires that his spirit urge the soul with his authority, and overpower it into an awful subjection thereto,—the soul being so disjointed by the apostacy, that its own faculties keep not, in reference to the things of God, their natural order to one another, further than as a holy rectitude is renewed in them by the Holy Ghost. Therefore is it necessary that the enlightening communication, which he transmits into it, be not only so clear as to scatter the darkness that clouded the mind, but so penetrating, as to strike and pierce the heart, to dissolve and relax its stiff and frozen rigour, and render it capable of a new mould and frame:—in order whereto, God, who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, is said to have shined into the hearts of them whom he renews, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

As they to whom this communication of God is in some degree afforded, hereupon apprehend, how necessary it was to them, so they perceive it to be delightful also, as well as necessary. And finding it yet given to them but in an imperfect^a degree, their continual cravings are still for more. Having tasted hereby how gracious the Lord is, as new-born babes they desire it, as sincere milk, that they may grow thereby.^a They hereby come to know God and the things of God

^a 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3.

with savour: and, wisdom having entered into their hearts, knowledge is pleasant to their soul.^a As every renewed taste provokes in them new desire, all such renewed desires dispose them to further and more satisfying delight. They sensibly discern the difference between their former dry and sapless notions of God, and the lively spirited apprehensions which they now have. They can in some measure understand the reason, why the Apostle should in such a rapture speak of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and why he should so triumphingly give thanks to God for the manifestation of his knowledge in every place.^b They can perceive there was good sense in those words, as they have a more quick and judicious perception of the fragrancy of that knowledge. It is to them a refreshing, vital, quickening perfume, most cheerfully odoriferous; the savour of life to life,^c lively in itself and to them, and so full of life, as to beget and transmit it, and replenish their souls therewith. A revelation of God, that is of such a nature, cannot but be highly delectable;

1. In respect of the matter revealed,—God himself being at least willing, in Christ, to become our God, in such a way, and upon such terms, as are expressed in the gospel.

2. In respect of the immediate way and manner of revelation, with so much facility continually coming in from time to time upon the soul,

^a Prov. ii. 10.

^b 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^c Ver. 16.

according as it is found ready by a dutiful compliance to admit it.

3. In respect of the life and vigour which it carries with it, whereby it is experienced to be a vital light. Dull, sluggish, ineffectual notions of such things can have, comparatively, little of delectation in them.

4. In respect of the design and tendency of the revelation to draw the soul into union with God, and that there may be not merely a transient glance of so lovely an object, but a continual intercourse between him and the soul. When once it apprehends, that God hath made this light to shine in upon me, not to amuse me, —but that here he fixes it as a lamp to guide me, in a stated course of communion with him,—how pleasant is it to think, he will be known for this blessed purpose!

Now, a communication of God, including such a revelation of him as will be apt to beget such a knowledge, cannot be without much matter of delight. But, besides, it also includes a transforming impression of his image. This yet more fully answers the enquiry, (when a person is said to enjoy God,) what does he immediately enjoy, or whereby is he said to enjoy God, or what does God communicate or transmit by which he may be said to be enjoyed? He communicates his own living likeness, the very image of himself, not the idea or likeness only by which he is known;—though it must be confessed, the knowledge of him, if he be known to be what he truly is, must suppose a true likeness of him offered

30 EFFECT IN IMPRESSING THE IMAGE OF GOD.

to the mind, and formed there. But this, of which we now speak, is not a merely representative but a real image. It is the product of the former, as is sufficiently to be collected from what has been said. For that appears to be not a mere airy, spiritless, ineffectual thing,—as the notion of God and of all divine matters is with the most—but operative, penetrating, efficacious, apt to beget suitable impressions upon the heart, and wholly to transform the soul. The effect of it, then, is this transformative impression itself, by which the soul becomes another ~~thing~~ than it was, a new creature,^a—old things being done away, and all things made new. In respect of this it is said to be born of God. This is the new man, which after God is said to be created in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness,^b—the divine nature participated ^c—the seed of God ^d—the prime and most excellent part of his creatures.

That communication of God, which must be supposed to be afforded to the regenerate in this world in order to their delighting in him, could signify little to that purpose, if with deformed and diseased souls they were only to look upon a very lovely object, themselves still remaining what they were. Nor does it delight them only as it is apprehended to be apt and aiming to work a happy change in them, but as it does it, or has in part done it.

God is proposed to our communion and fel-

^a 2 Cor. v. 17. ^b Eph. iv. 24. ^c 2 Pet. i. 4. ^d 1 John iii. 9.

fellowship, under the name of Light, but such a light whereby we, that were darkness, become light in the Lord;^a that, as he is the father of lights, we may appear the children of such a father¹, and walk as children of light.^b For we are presently told, that, if we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth;^c but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have a mutual fellowship,^d that is, between God and ourselves. It is needful, that we have that apprehension of him: and he, therefore, by solemn message, makes a declaration of himself, that he is light; "This then is the message, which we have heard from him, and declare to you, that God is light, and with him is no darkness at all," i. e. the most pure, holy, excellent, glorious Being.

But for what purpose are we to have that apprehension? We are told by the Apostle, for what. He makes that declaration, with the design that we might be entered into the same fellowship, in which he was already. For this end, therefore, we are to have this apprehension. But inasmuch as he immediately adds, that if we pretend to that fellowship, while we converse in darkness, we lie; it is manifest, that this discovery of God, and our suitable apprehension of him, are no further serviceable to their end, than as bringing us into fellowship with him, or than as he forms us by his beams into his own likeness: that thus, so far as our capacity and pre-

^a 1 John i. 3, 5.^b Eph. v. 8.^c Ver. 6.^d Ver. 7.

sent state admit, we may be truly in a degree made pure, bright, shining, excellent creatures, resembling our Maker, and being a second time formed after the image of him who created us.

The gospel is the formative instrument in this work. The new creature is said to be begotten of the Word of God; and the divine nature is said to be communicated through the exceeding great and precious promises, which, discovering God's gracious nature and favourable inclination towards us, are an apt means, but no more than a means, to render us well-natured and not contrary to him. Faith admits the gospel-discovery into the soul, and makes it, from an external word without, become an ingrafted word, "the word of Christ dwelling richly in us," and so gives it the advantage of becoming thus mightily operative, (for to them only who believe, is it the power of God to salvation;) and being received, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, it works effectually in them that believe. To them who believe it not, it signifies nothing, is an empty sound, or only as a tale that is told.

Inasmuch as the gospel-revelation is the instrument of this impression, by it the impression must be measured, and with it must agree. This revelation being expressive of the nature of God, and of his mind and will in reference to us, the impression cannot but be agreeable to that revelation; but it must also carry in it the resemblance and likeness of God himself, for the gospel-revelation is God's seal, the stamp upon it is a model of his image. The soul, sealed

therewith, bears on it at once the signature both of the author and the instrument. But because our best and surest way of forming true and right apprehensions of God, is to attend and guide ourselves by the representation that is made of him in the gospel-revelation,—for it were useless and in vain, if, by letting our thoughts work at random without reference to it, we might conceive as fitly of God and of his mind concerning us, as by its direction and guidance,—therefore are we to aim at conformity to God, as he is there represented. For that is the proper likeness of him, which we are to inquire after, (and to be impressed only by his gospel,) which is there expressed and represented. “We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory.”^a It is by the glory of the Lord shining through that glass, that we are changed; and the image, into which we are changed, is the same image that is to be seen in that glass. For there God has provided that such a representation of himself and of his mind should appear, as is most suitable to our case and state, and such as most concerns us to have the view and image of. It represents him in his imitable excellencies, and shews what he is towards us, what his counsels, determinations, and constitutions are concerning us; and hereby shews, what we should be, or what temper of spirit becomes us, in reference to

^a 2 Cor. iii. 18.

such a revelation ; and, when we receive this his impressive communication, he really makes us thereby become such. Then it is, that it will be found most highly delectable. A heart, formed according to the revelation of God in Christ, and cast into the mould of the gospel, (as is the import of the Apostle's words,*) hath a spring of pleasure in itself; not of perfect un-mixed pleasure,—for there is much yet remaining, that cannot but be displeasing and offensive to such as have learned no longer to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, and who have senses exercised to discern betwixt good and evil. Indeed, by the same vital principle, the soul is made capable both of the sweetest delights and the quickest sense of pain : while it was dead, it was sensible of neither.

Nor is it an original spring. Whatever it has, that is good and pleasant, comes from a higher head and is communicated. But the communication remains not in this heart as in a dead receptacle, but creates the soul a living spring itself. “The Lord shall satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and as a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”^b After which it follows, “Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord,” &c.^c So, though the waters, that are so pleasantly refreshing to holy souls, are given by Christ, yet he himself tells us, they shall be in him, to whom they are given, a well of water

* Rom. vi. 17.

^b Isa. lviii. 11.

^c Ver. 14.

springing up into everlasting life.^a Whence also the good man is said to be “satisfied from himself,”^b and “the mouth of the righteous to be a well of life,” i. e. to others, much more must his heart be so to himself. Nor indeed can there be a vainer or more absurd design and expectation, than to aim immediately at delights and joys, without ever looking after that transforming, purifying, quickening communication from God, in which he is to be enjoyed. This is apparently the most prejudicial and dangerous mistake, the practical error of many persons of much pretence to religion, who dream and boast of nothing less than raptures and transports,—who yet have never known or felt what the work of regeneration or the new creature means, but have only got some notions of God and Christ, which tickle their fancies without changing their hearts, and are taken by them for divine enjoyments. Others somewhat awakened and convinced, but not renewed, who have the same mistaken apprehension, as vainly seek and catch at joys and sweetnesses, while their unsanctified hearts yet lie steeped in the gall of bitterness: they wonder and complain, that they feel not in themselves the delights, whereof they find Scripture sometimes make mention,—while at the same time they expect and snatch at them in a preposterous impossible way, abstracting them from the things themselves, wherein the pleasure and delight lie. They would have

^a John iv. 14.

^b Prov. xiv. 14.

delight without the delectable good, which must immediately yield it, or without foregoing the noisome evils, that hinder it.—This makes it necessary to treat more largely of the delightful communication, by which only the soul is capable of delighting in God.

CHAPTER III.

Satisfaction accompanying the Change of Heart towards God. Satisfaction from Repentance and Devotedness to God. Joy from Communion with God. Joy from Trust and Dependence on God. Joy from Love of God. Joy from Exercise of a good Conscience. Natural Aversion to Christ as Mediator. Happy State of the Soul believing in Christ.

As to this branch of the subject—namely, the vital, sanctifying, transforming influence, whereby the soul is wrought to a conformity to the gospel—if we take a more distinct view of it, we shall find, it cannot but have in it abundant matter of delight.—The thing, here to be communicated, is an universal rectitude of temper and disposition, including the removal of such as are sinful and corrupt, and the settlement of such tempers as are holy and gracious;—both of which are to be measured and estimated, as to their good or evil, by the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, surely, that must be a blessed and delightful state—and it is that, towards which this divine communication gradually tends,—wherein a wretched soul, that was lost in the impurities of sin, shall be stripped of all the perverse inclinations and corrupt affections, which the gospel of Christ

condemns, and invested with all the parts of that purity, that gracious and holy frame, which the gospel recommends. For as the former carry in them matter of certain vexation and anguish, which it is hereby freed from; so the latter manifestly carry in themselves matter of unspeakable delight and pleasure, which it hereby partakes. And by the same degrees, by which this divine communication produces the latter of these, it expels the former. By the same degrees, by which any are made "partakers of the divine nature," they "escape the corruptions which are in the world through lust."

That we may be here a little more particular, without descending into the innumerable particularities which might be severally spoken of upon this occasion, we shall only consider this heart-rectifying communication in reference to some of the principal things, towards which the spirit of man may be either perversely or duly and rightly inclined.

In order whereto it must be considered, that wherein this communication from God is transforming, it is also enlivening, and therefore furnishes the soul with the power of spiritual sensation, whereby it comes to apprehend its former temper as very grievous and detestable, and, proportionably, the holy frame, which is to be introduced, as infinitely desirable.

It must needs be very delightful to such a soul to feel itself in part rectified, and to expect it further in its temper and inclinations,—first, towards God, towards whom it was most disin-

clined, that is, both towards God as its end, and towards Christ as the way to him.

As to God himself, its end. The soul finds upon reflection, it was dead towards God, without motion towards him, without inclination, with all its powers bent and set quite another way; so that to persuade it to begin a course of holy motion towards God, was like persuading a stone to fly upwards. It could not trust the original truth, nor love the sovereign good, nor obey the supreme authority. Its course was nothing else but continual recession from him, towards whom it should have been continually pressing forward with all its might. It was wont to say to him, in whom was its life and all its hope, "Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" it was utterly alienated from the life of God, and chose to live as without him in the world. And although it still remain thus in too great a degree, yet as it abhors this as a hateful way of living, and desires it may be otherwise, so is it sensibly delighted, that it does in some degree perceive a change, and that now it can find itself returning into its right and natural state of subordination to God.

And although in returning, and in its continual course afterwards towards God, there be much cause for the exercise of repentance,—the disposition whereto is a part of that new nature now communicated,—yet even such relentings, as are due and suitable upon this account, are not unpleasant: there is pleasure mingled with

such tears, and with those mournings which are not without hope, and which flow, naturally and without force, from a living principle within, as waters from their still freshly-springing fountain. When the soul finds itself unbound and set at liberty, when it can freely pour out itself to God, dissolve kindly and melt before him, it does it, with regret only at what it has done and been, not at what it is now doing,—except that it can do it no more; aspiring even to the infinite herein, while it yet sees it must be confined within some bounds. It loves to lie in the dust and abase itself; and is pleased with the humiliation, contrition, and brokenness of heart, which repentance towards God includes in it. So that as God is delighted with this sacrifice, the soul is delighted with the offering of itself up to him.

What inexpressible pleasure accompanies its devoting itself to God, when bemoaning itself, and returning with weeping and supplication, it says, “ Now, lo, I come to thee, thou art the Lord my God. I have brought thee back thine own, which I had sacrilegiously alienated and stolen away, the heart which was gone astray, that has been so long a fugitive from thy blessed presence, from thy service and communion. Take now the soul which thou hast made; possess thy own right; enter upon it, stamp it with the entire impression of thine own seal, and mark it for thine. Other lords shall no more have dominion. What have I to do any more with the idols, wherewith I was wont to provoke thee to jealousy? I will now make mention of thy name,

and of thine only. I bind myself to thee in everlasting bonds, in a covenant never to be forgotten."

The self denial, which is included in this transaction, has no little pleasure in it. When the soul freely quits all pretence to itself, and by its own consent passes into his acknowledged right,—disclaims itself, and all its own former interests, inclinations, and ends, and is resolved to be to him and to no other,—when this is done unreservedly, without any intention of retaining or keeping back any thing from him ... absolutely, without making any conditions of its own, but only agreeing to and thankfully accepting his ... peremptorily and without hesitation, and without halting between two opinions,—how does it now rejoice to feel itself offer willingly! They, who have life and sense about them, can tell there is pleasure in all this. And the oftener repetition is made hereof,—so it be done with life, not with trifling formality—they so often renew the relishes of the same pleasure.

Continued commerce with God, agreeable to the tenor of that covenant struck with him, how pleasant and delightful is it! How pleasant to be a friend of God, an associate of the Most High, a domestic, no more a stranger or foreigner, but of his own household,—to live wholly upon the plentiful provisions, and under the happy order and government of his family,—to have a heart to seek all from him, and lay out all for him!

How great is the pleasure of trust, of living

free from care, that is, from care of any thing but how to please and honour him in a cheerful unsolicitous dependance, expecting from him our daily bread, believing he will not let our souls famish,—that, while they hunger and thirst after righteousness, they shall be filled,—that they shall be sustained with the bread and waters of life,—that, when they hunger, he will feed them with hidden manna, and with the fruits that grow on the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God,—that, when they thirst, he will give water, and add milk and honey without money and without price.

How pleasant, not to doubt but he that feeds ravens and clothes lilies, will feed and clothe us,—to be so taken up in seeking his kingdom and righteousness, as freely to leave it to him to add the other things as he thinks fit,—to take no thought for to-morrow,—to have a heart framed herein according to divine precept,—not to be encumbered or kept in an anxious suspense by the thoughts and fears of what may fall out, (by which many suffer the same affliction a thousand times over, which God would have them suffer but once.) A firm repose on the goodness of Providence, and its sure and never erring wisdom,—a steady persuasion, that our heavenly Father knows what we have need of, and what it is fittest for us to want, to suffer, or enjoy,—how delightful a life do these make, and how agreeable to one born of God, his own Son, and heir of all things,—as being joint heirs with

Christ, and claiming by that large grant that says, "all things are yours."

To live in the fear of God is not without its pleasure. It composes the soul, expels the vanity which is not without vexation, represses exorbitant motions, checks unruly passions, keeps all within in a pleasant peaceful calm.

To live in his love is delight itself, or a tendency towards it. To be in such a temper of soul as to resolve, "Him I will seek and pursue, him I will study to please and serve, and spend my strength and life in serving him, though I yet know not whether he will accept, or how he will deal with me,"—this cannot but have a certain sensible delectation in it.

To live in a stated habitual subjection to him as the Lord of our lives, how pleasant is it! To have learned to obey, to be accustomed to the yoke, to taste and prove the goodness and acceptableness of his will, through an effectual transformation in the renewal of our minds,—to be, by the law of the spirit of life, made free from the law of sin and death,—to be able to speak it as the undisguised sense of our hearts, "because thy law is holy, therefore thy servant loveth it," to reckon it a royal law of liberty, so as to account ourselves so much the more free, by how much we are the more thus bound, this is a temper, that has not more of duty in it than it has of delight. There is such a thing as delighting in the law of God according to the inward man, when there is yet a difficulty in

suppressing and keeping under inordinate rebellious workings of corrupt nature, to which there is no desire an indulgence should be given, by having the law attempered to them, but severity rather used to reduce them to a conformity to the law. So will it be, if the law become an impression of the heart. When it can once be truly said, "Thy law is in my heart," it will be also with the same sincerity said, "I delight to do thy will, O my God."^a

The continual exercise of good conscience towards God has great pleasure in it. Hereby our way and course are continually reviewed, and we pass censure upon ourselves. The more carefully and the oftener this is done, so much the more delectable it will be ; that is, the more approvable we shall find them upon review. We shall order our course the more warily, as we reckon upon undergoing an inquisition and search, wherein an apprehensive serious heart well understands, that it is not itself to be the supreme Judge. How blessed an imitation might there be here of the blessed God himself, who, we find, beheld his six days works, and "lo, they were all very good,"—whereupon follows his delightful day of rest. So, we shall, in some degree of conformity to him,—finding our works to be in such respect good, that he will by gracious indulgence accept them as such,—have our own Sabbath, a sweet and peaceful rest in our own spirits. Though we can pretend no higher than sincerity only, yet how sweet are

^a Psalm xl. 8.

44 JOY FROM EXERCISE OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

the reflections of a well instructed conscience upon that,—when our hearts reproach us not, and we resolve, they shall not as long as we live,—when we are conscious to ourselves of no base designs, and propose nothing to ourselves, wherein we apprehend cause to decline God's eye,—when we walk in the light, and are seeking no darkness or shadow of death, where (as workers of iniquity) we may hide ourselves from him,—when we can implore him as an assistant, and appeal to him as a Judge in reference to our daily affairs and wonted course. Is this without pleasure? “This is our rejoicing,” says the Apostle, “the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world.”^a

Thus to converse with God,—Him, whom we daily design to glorify and serve, and whom we expect daily in some measure to enjoy, and fully and finally ere it be long,—is certainly throughout a way of pleasantness and peace. How delectable then is this soul-rectifying communication from God, whereby, being before so disaffected, it becomes now so well inclined towards him in all these respects.

But because the exigency of the case did require, by reason of sin that had cut off the intercourse, that there should be a Mediator, to open the way and renew the former friendship, it was also necessary, that so the soul might duly move towards God, and that it

^a 2 Cor. i. 12.

should be rightly disposed also towards him. We are therefore to consider too, how delectable this communication must be, as it rightly disposes the heart towards Christ, our way to God. For towards him we must understand it to have been most obstinately and inflexibly averse; and therefore a mighty communication of power was necessary to set it right here.

With regard to that part of religion which is natural, there was so much of an advantage beforehand, as that there was an old foundation to build upon. There are some notions of God left, not only concerning his existence, but concerning also his nature and many of his attributes. And from the apprehension what man was, it was in some measure discernible what he should have been, and ought yet to be towards God; hence would arise many checks and rebukes of conscience, when he was found to be otherwise: so that there was somewhat in nature to be wrought upon, as to this part of religion. But as to that part which respects the Mediator, this was a frame wholly to be raised up from the ground. There were no principles immediately and directly inclining to take part with the gospel, but all was to be implanted anew,—the way, that God would take, to bring back souls to him, being so infinitely above all human thought. Though to a considering pagan it would not sound strangely, that God ought to be trusted, feared, or loved,—yet to such the Gospel of Christ was foolishness. Besides, this

way of dealing with men was not only unknown and unimaginable to them, not so much as once thought of or to be guessed at, but the tendency and aspect of it, when it should come to be made known, was such, that it could not but find the temper of men's spirits most strongly opposite, not merely ignorant but prejudiced and highly disaffected. For this course most directly tended to take men quite off from their old course, to stoop and humble and even bring them to nothing, to stain the pride of their glory, and lay them down in the dust as abject wretches, in themselves fit for nothing but to be trampled on and crushed by the foot of divine vengeance. Suppose a man to have admitted a conviction, from the light of his own mind or conscience, that he was a sinner, that he had offended his Maker, incurred his just displeasure, and made himself liable to his punishing justice ; it would yet have been hard, to make him believe it altogether impossible to him, to do any thing to remedy the matter, and to restore himself to divine favour and acceptance. He would naturally be inclined to think he should easily find out a way to make God amends. He would recount with himself all his own natural excellencies, and think himself capable of doing some great thing, that should more than expiate his offence, and make recompense abundantly for any wrong that he had done. But when the gospel shall come, and tell him he has deserved eternal wrath, and that his sin is inexpiable, but by ever-

lasting sufferings, or what is of equal value,—that here is one, the eternal Son of God, who became a man like himself, and thereupon a voluntary sacrifice, to make atonement for the transgression of men,—that God will never accept another sacrifice for the sins of men than his, nor ever any service at their hands but for his sake,—that they must receive him now revealed to them, rely upon him, and trust to him wholly, or perish without mercy,—that he has put the government over them into his hands, and laid it on his shoulders, and that they must subject themselves to him as their ruler and judge, the great arbiter of life and death to them and all men,—that they are to be entirely devoted to him, as long as they live, as their Redeemer and Lord,—that, as in him they are to have righteousness and strength, so to him they must pay all possible homage and subjection, to him their knees must bow, and their tongues confess,—that they must receive the law from his mouth, be prescribed to by him, comply with his will, though never so much to the crossing of their own,—that notwithstanding, they must know they can deserve nothing by it, and that, so vile and worthless miscreants they are become, God will never have to do with them upon other terms,—when this shall appear to be the state of the case, there cannot but be a strong stream to be striven against, and most vehement counter strivings of the haughty and licentious spirit of man. So that it is not strange, it should be said by our Saviour, “No man can come unto

me except my Father draw him," and that the exceeding greatness of power, according to the workings of the mightiest power in any case, should be put forth upon them that believe. Therefore men are in Christ by creative power only; "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;"^a he is new made, if he be in Him. And this aversion, being so deeply natural, will still in a degree remain, while any thing of corrupt nature remains, in the hearts of even the regenerate themselves. A continual exertion of the same power will be ever requisite to hold souls to Christ, and retain them in their station in him. "He that establisheth us with you in Christ, is God:"^b as if it were said, it is only a God that can do this. And how is God admired and adored upon this single account: "Now to him, that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began—to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever."^c

But as the heart-rectifying communication from God, in this matter, is such as carries mighty power with it, so it gives proportionable pleasure, when it has overcome, and set the soul right in this thing. How delectable is it to receive the Son of God, when the heart is made willing in the day of power, when his cords take hold of the soul, and draw it to him!

^a 2 Cor. v. 15.^b 2 Cor. i. 21.^c Rom. xvi. 25.

What pleasure is there in the consenting self-resigning act and disposition !

It is most highly delightful to receive him, and give up ourselves to him as our full suitable good, so exactly answering all the exigencies of our distressed case. Then, the soul, sensibly apprehending its true state, cries out, "None but Christ," and finds him present, waiting only for consent, readily offering himself, "Here I am, take me, thy Jesus, thy help, thy life !" How overcomingly pleasant is this to a soul, that feels its distress, and perceives itself ready to perish, and that daily sees itself perishing, were it not for him. How pleasant, when, in the time of love, he finds the poor soul in its blood, and says to it "live;" clothes it, decks it, makes it perfect through his own comeliness, tenders himself to it, overcomes by his own mercy and goodness, and prevails with a sinful creature to accept him. How gladly doth it throw off every thing of its own, that it may entirely possess him, and be possessed by him. Here is the joy of espousals. That very consent itself, if it be sincere, has a secret joy accompanying it; and the soul feels the gratefulness and pleasure of its own act, though it do not for the present examine and take a view of it. For it is now, from a principle of life, embracing and drawing into union with itself an object, that is all life and goodness and sweetness, which therefore sheds its own delightful fragrantcy through the soul, while it is in the mean time acting only upon the object directly. and not reflecting upon its own act, or

considering in that very instant what will be consequential thereupon. But if withal it do consider, that it is receiving him who is to bring it to God,—who is able to do it, even to save to the uttermost all that will come to God by him, —who is intent upon that design, and did, in the midst of dying agonies, breathe forth his soul in the prosecution of it,—and with whom God requires it to unite for this very purpose, this cannot but add unspeakably to the delightfulness of this transaction, and of this effusion of the Holy Ghost, in the virtue whereof the thing is done.

And to receive him as our Lord,—which is joined with that other capacity, wherein we receive him, namely, of a Saviour,—this also, and the heart-subduing influence that disposes to it, is most highly delectable. When the soul, that once said within itself, ‘I will not have him to reign over me,’ is brought freely to yield, and with sincere loyal resolutions and affections devotes itself to him, consents to his government, submits to his yoke and burden, says to him with an ungainsaying heart, as its full sense, “Now, thou Lord of my life and hope, who hast so long striven with me, so oft and earnestly pressed me hereto, so variously dealt with me to make me understand thy merciful design, and who seekest to rule with no other aim or intent but that thou mayest save, and who hast founded thy dominion in thy blood, and didst die and revive and rise again, that thou mightest be Lord of the living and the dead, and therefore my

Lord,—accept now a self-resigning soul ; I make a free surrender of myself, I bow and submit to thy sovereign power, I fall at the footstool of thy throne, thou Prince of the kings of the earth, who hast loved sinners, and washed them from their sins in thy blood ; I will from henceforth be no longer mine own, but thine ; I am ready to receive thy commands, to do thy will, to serve thy interests, to sacrifice my all to thy name and honour ; my whole life and being are for ever thine :”—I say, there is pleasure in the very doing this itself, as often as it is sincerely done. And it adds hereto, if it be more distinctly considered, that it is no mean or undeserving person, to whom this homage is paid, and obligation made for future obedience. He is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person, the heir of all things, and who sustains all things by the word of his power. It is he, whose name is Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. It is he, to whom all power is given both in heaven and earth, and, more especially, power over all flesh, that he might give eternal life to as many as were given him. It is he, who spoiled principalities and powers, and made an open show of them ; he, whom—because, when he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, he humbled himself, made himself of no reputation, took on him the form of a servant, and became obedient to death,—the Father hath therefore highly exalted, and given him a name above every name, that at

his name every knee should bow ; and of whom—when he brought him, his first-born, into the world,—he said, “ Let all the angels of God worship him.”

He is one, whose temper is all goodness and sweetness. “ Tell Sion, thy king cometh, meek and lowly.” He came into this world drawn down only by his own pity and love, beholding the desolations and ruins, that were wrought in it everywhere, sin universally reigning, and death by sin spreading its dark shadow and a dreadful cloud over all the earth : in which darkness, the prince thereof was ruling and leading men captive at his will, having drawn them off from the blessed God their life, and sunk them into a deep oblivion of their own original, and into disaffection to their true happiness, that could only be found in God.

This great Lord and Prince of life and peace came down on purpose to be the restorer of souls, to repair the desolations and ruins of many generations. He came full of grace and truth, and has scattered blessings over the world, wheresoever he came,—has infinitely obliged all that ever knew him,—and is he, in whom all the nations of the earth must be blessed. Who would not with joy swear fealty to him and take pleasure to do him homage ? Who would not recount with delight the inexpressible felicity of living under the governing power of such a one ?

If the tenor and scope of all his laws and constitutions be viewed, what will be found but obligations upon men to be happy. How easy

his yoke, how light his burden ! What is the frame of his kingdom, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Who would not now say, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof."^a Why should it not be triumphantly said among the heathen, "The Lord reigneth ; the world shall be established, that it cannot be moved ; let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad ; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof ; let the fields rejoice and all that is therein, let all the trees of the forest rejoice !"

CHAPTER IV.

Happy State of a Soul set right towards Men. Happy State of a Soul set right towards itself. Happy State of a Soul set on Heaven. Happy State of a Soul framed after the image of God.

IT is plain that, be the matter of joy here what it will, be there never so much cause of exultation and glorying in God, the righteousness and peace, which his kingdom promises, never actually take place, nor the joy that is connected therewith, until the Holy Ghost dispose and form men's spirits thereto.^b For all this is but mere dream and idle talk to those who hear only of these things, and feel not that vital influence insinuating itself, that may give the living sense and savour of them. We may rather expect

^a Ps. xcvi. 1.

^b Rom. xiv. 17.

seas and fields, beasts and trees, to sing his triumphant song and chant his praises, than those men whose hearts are not attuned to his government, and who are yet under the dominion of another Lord, not being yet "by the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, made free from the law of sin and death." But where this is effectually done, how large matter of most rational pleasure do they find here; while there is nothing in that whole system of laws, by which he governs, that is either vain, unequal, or unpleasant, or upon any account grievous. But this is not the estimate of distempered spirits, or of any other than those in whose hearts his law is written, and who, because they love him, keep his commandments.^a To love his commands are most connatural; "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." They are not grievous,^b they are joyous, delightful, pleasant,—but to them only who, being born of God, have overcome the world. This holy influence and communication of God are therefore grateful, and contribute not a little to delight in this respect, that thereby men's spirits are set right towards God, namely, both towards the Creator and the Redeemer.

Hereby men's spirits are rectified towards men. They have the universal law of love wrought deep into their hearts, being filled with all goodness, righteousness, meekness, mercifulness; apt to do no wrong, to bear any wrong, to pity

^a John xv. 10.

^b 1 John v. 3.

and help the distressed, to love enemies, and, as there is opportunity, to do good to all, especially to them that are of the household of faith. We must understand in this, as well as in the other parts of that stamp, which the Spirit of God puts on the souls of men, that the impression corresponds and answers to the seal, the inward communication to the outward revelation of God's will. And so we find the matter is: for as divine precepts require this should be the temper of men's spirits, so the very things, that compose and make up that blessed temper, are said to be the fruits of his own Spirit; "The fruit of the Spirit is peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness;"^a and again, "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth."^b Now has not that soul a spring of pleasure within itself, that is in these respects as God would have it be, that is conscious to itself of nothing but righteousness, goodness, benignity, candour, and is in all things acted by a spirit of love, "that suffereth long, and is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and never faileth."^c This so equally poises and moves a man's spirit, that he carries himself seemly and suitably towards all men, takes plea-

^a Gal v. 22, 23.^b Eph. v. 9.^c 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

sure in the best, in the saints and excellent of the earth has all his delight; neither envies the greatest, nor despises the meanest; neither is revengeful towards them that injure him, nor unthankful to them that oblige him; is apt to learn of good men and to teach the bad, by observing and giving the most imitable example; is not undutiful to superiors, nor morose and unconvertible towards equals; lives not to himself, is a common good to all within the sphere, through which his activity can extend itself; does good from the steady inclination of his own will, and from an implanted principle of goodness. It is evident, God has formed such a man's spirit to delight of the purest kind, and to the best sort of pleasure; and they who are strangers to it banish it from their own breasts by the resistance and grief they give his blessed Spirit, and by harbouring in their own bosoms their own tormentors, pride, wrath, envy, malice, revengefulness, and bitterness of spirit, which, as they render them uneasy and intolerable to all about them, so most of all to themselves.

Men's spirits are hereby also rectified towards themselves. All the good qualifications we can mention or think of, redound to a man's self, and turn to his own advantage, repose, and delight: yet there are some that more directly terminate on a man's self, wherein the rectitude, we now speak of, in great part consists. When we are obliged to love others as ourselves, it supposes not only an allowable but a laudable self-love.

“Men shall praise thee when thou dost well to thyself.” Before this right spirit be renewed in a man, he wounds himself. How cruel to themselves are all unholy persons! What wastes and desolation do they make in their own souls, by breaking the order, which God and nature at first established there, by dethroning their own reason and judgment, which ought to bear sway within them! This banishes delight, and drives it far away from them. They see what is fittest for them to do and seek, yet run quite a contrary course. What storms do they hereby raise in their own bosoms! What a torture is it, when a man’s own light and knowledge bear a standing testimony against him, and hold him under a continual doom.

This gracious communication from God sets all things in a good degree right within, so that, where there was nothing before but darkness, disorder, and confusion, there now shines a mild, pleasant, cheerful light, which spreads regularity, purity, and peace. How great is the pleasure that arises from self-denial, not only as it is an act of duty towards God, but as it is an act of justice and mercy towards our own souls! How pleasant, when we have learned to abandon ourselves, not to seek and serve ourselves unduly, and are only inclined to cleave to ourselves as far as we ought, when that idol self is no longer maintained within us at the expense of our peace, comfort, safety, and eternal hope! How much more easy and reasonable a service is it, (when once the grace of God and their own

experience give men to understand it,) to study to please him than themselves,—when they feel themselves dead to their former lord and service, and only alive to God through Jesus Christ,—when sin no longer reigns in their mortal bodies, that they should obey it in the lusts thereof,^a—when they no more yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but have yielded themselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead,^b—when, being made free from sin, they are become servants unto righteousness.^c What an ease is it to the spirit of man, when he hath not himself to seek and serve in any unlawful disallowed sense,—when he perceives himself by a prevailing better principle counterpoised, and the weight and bias of his own spirit incline him quite another way,—when he finds he hath nothing left him to do, but to serve God, to know his will and to do it,—and is disburdened of all unnecessary care for himself. That which is necessary is part of his duty, and therefore done on purpose only for God; that which is unnecessary and forbidden (which part only was burdensome) is supplied by (what has the greatest ease and pleasure in it imaginable) trust and self-resignation to his pleasure and will. What life is pleasant, if this be not! Surely, wherein it is attained, it is most pleasant; and hither this gracious heart-rectifying communication is gradually tending.

How great is the pleasure that arises from

^a Rom. vi. 11, 12.

^b Ver. 13.

^c Ver. 18.

self-government, when the heart is patient of restraint, and easily obeys the leading of an enlightened mind, when order is maintained between the superior faculties and the inferior, and there are no contentious murmurs of ungovernable appetites against the law of conscience. It is true, where this holy rectitude only in a degree takes place, there will be many conflicts; but those conflicts are in order to victory; and how joyful and glorious is the triumph upon that victory, when the soul enters upon its thanksgiving song, "I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!" how happy a state is that, when there are now no tumults within! "The wicked are as a troubled sea, that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Here, is no governing principle, no sceptre to check the rage of those waters. But when that power goes forth in the soul, whose very word the winds and seas obey, how peaceful and pleasant a calm ensues. Now is the man restored to himself, and again in his right mind. He is truly now said to enjoy himself, and upon the best terms; that is, he enjoys himself in and under God. He is, in a due subordination, master of himself; he possesses his own soul.

How great pleasure arises from a constant self-inspection, when a man's spirit dwells within itself, watches over its motions as its proper charge, and is formed to a compliance with that precept, "Keep thy heart with all diligence."^a Upon that consideration, and seri-

^a Prov. iv. 23.

ously weighing that thence are the issues of life, all vital acts and operations whatsoever will savour of the root and principle whence they proceed, and be as the heart is,—good and pure, if that be so,—if otherwise, corrupt. How great the pleasure, to have a spirit habituated to the business of its own province; its eyes not like the fool's in the ends of the earth, but turned inward upon itself. Hence, his own vineyard is best kept; while the sluggard's, who neglects himself, is wholly overcome with thorns and briers, which cover its face. How forlorn and comfortless a spectacle has such a man of his own soul!—the horror whereof he can only avoid by the more hopeless course of turning off his eye. Such men are strangers at home, and afraid to converse with themselves.

Herein lies much of the heart-rectifying work and power of grace, namely, in disposing and setting the heart so far right towards itself, that it may have the patience to look inward, and the pleasure which will thence afterwards most naturally arise. The great aversion hereto of misgiving hearts is not otherwise overcome. But when it is, how do all things flourish under such a one's careful self-reflecting eye! That soul is a watered garden. Thither it can invite His presence, who is altogether made up of delights, to come and eat his pleasant fruits. Now, retirement and solitude become delectable. The man delightfully associates with himself, and singles out himself to be his own companion; so that he is never less alone than when alone. How unspeak-

able a happiness is this, when the great Mediator, who undertook to reconcile God to the soul, shall thus have also reconciled the soul to itself! Consider, how dreadful the case is, when a man's wickedness has compassed him with fears, and made him a terror to himself. Thence it may be understood, how grateful a change it is, when he is reformed into a son of peace, and made a delight to himself, when he can recreate himself, and refresh his tired eye ... overcharged with beholding the sad things that everywhere come in view from a world lost in wickedness ... by looking into God's own plantation within himself; and, considering it under that notion only, he does not look upon himself with pride, nor upon others with disdain. He beholds, with a sort of self-complacency, what God has wrought and done there,—not with self-arrogance, as knowing there still is a self, upon which he has reason to look with abhorrence and self-loathing. He well understands who made him differ, not only from others but from himself; and the more he is used to such self-reflection, the more pleasant it becomes to him; that is, if he confine not his eye too much to the dark side of his own soul, and look to the more lightsome side with the remembrance, that whatsoever he is that is good and grateful to behold, he is by grace. He thus grows familiar with himself, and the sight mends as it is oftener beheld,—even while it is not always observed to do so. Though things look many times sadly and sometimes dubiously, that does but occasion the accomplish-

ment of a more diligent search, which engages to more earnest labour and struggling with God and with himself; and this labour is recompensed with fruit and pleasure. God is invoked not only for redress but for further search; the request is, "Search and try me, O Lord, see if there be any way of wickedness in me." And, here, the sincerity, which appears in that self-suspicion and jealousy over their own souls, is not without its grateful relishes; a secret delight insinuates and mingles with the appeal, which such a soul makes to Him, whose eye searches the heart.

Thus, then, upon all accounts, this divine communication is delectable, as it tends to rectify men's dispositions towards themselves; and, in reference to their own souls we may add, this divine communication contributes much to the matter of delight, as it sets men's spirits right in their dispositions towards this and the other world, the present and future state of things. How great a work is necessary to be done in this respect,—wherein things are so monstrously out of course, and men become thereby not strangers only to delight and pleasure, but even incapable of any such relishes, till they be redressed! How vitiated and unexercised are men's senses as to these things, and unable to discern between good and evil! Their grosser sense is utterly incompetent, and a spiritual more refined sense is wanting. Therefore do they judge, choose, love, and pursue, only as that most incompetent and injudicious principle directs. That

is appealed to in all cases ; all their measures are taken from thence ; that only is called good, which to their sensual imagination, tinctured by the earthliness and carnality of their hearts, appears so ; that evil, which the same principle pronounces to be so. According hereto is the whole bent and inclination of their souls, and they are only influenced and governed by the powers of this sensible world. The things of the world to come have no power with them ; no motives from thence signify anything. They are only steered, in their whole course, by the apprehension of advantages or disadvantages, in reference to their present secular concerns. They love this world and the things of this world, mind earthly things, and are not startled, when they are so plainly told, that men of this character have not the love of the Father in them, and are enemies to the cross of Christ, and that their end will be destruction. It is a death to them to think of dying ; not from the fear of what may ensue,—they have atheism enough to stifle such fear,—but from the love of their earthly stations and that vile earthly body, in which they dwell.

But how delightful a thing is the change, which this rectifying communication makes ! How pleasant, to live in this world as a pilgrim and stranger, seeking still the better the heavenly country,—to behold the various enticements, here offered to view, without inclination towards them, the frightful aspect of things without commotion. Is not this delectable, to dwell apart

from this world in the midst of it,—in the secret place of the Most High,^a under his pavilion, as one of his hidden ones, withdrawn from the communion of this world to his own communion,^b—so severed from this world, as not to partake of its spirit but of another, a greater and more mighty, as well as a purer and more holy spirit, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world;”^c and again, “We have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things, which are freely given us of God.”^d The divine spirit disposes the soul to these things, and unites it with them, when it disinclines and disjoins it from this world and the things thereof; and thereby discovers this soul to be quite of another community from that of this world, namely, of a heavenly community. What matter of joy and glorying is it, when one is crucified to this world, and this world to him!^e the cross is itself rendered amiable and a thing to be gloried in, on account of the design and end of that tragedy which was acted thereon, within which design this happy effect is included. We elsewhere find the Apostle expressing his vehement desire to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection,”^f and “the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death.”^g But what did he lastly aim at in this? the next words more fully speak out *the power of his resurrection* to be

^a Ps. xci. 1.^b Ps. xxvii. 4.^c 1 John iv. 4.^d 1 Cor. ii. 12.^e Gal. vi. 14.^f Phil. iii. 10.^g Phil. iii. 10.

the thing chiefly in his eye, and that he desired *the fellowship of his sufferings* as a means to that end, though it seemed a sharp and painful means; “if by any means I might attain the resurrection of the dead;”^a as if he had said, I care not what I undergo, not the sufferings even of a painful crucifixion itself, or that my worldly earthly self do suffer conformably to the sufferings of my crucified Lord, I care not by what severe method the thing be brought about,—if by any means it may be brought about,—that I may know the power of his resurrection so feelingly, as to attain also the resurrection of the dead. And what was that? no doubt to attain a state (which he confesses he had not yet perfectly attained, but was in pursuit of) suitable to his relation and union with a risen Jesus. Union with him supposes a rising with him; “If ye then be risen with Christ;”^b it is taken as a thing granted, that they who are his are risen with him. And what state and temper of spirit would be suitable to that supposition? the next words shew, “seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on the things above, not on the things on the earth.” Then follows the method, in which they were brought to the capacity of doing so; “for ye are dead.” Their professed relation to Christ supposed them risen, and therefore first supposed them dead. Now, if they would do suitably to what their profession

^a Phil. iii. 11.^b Col. i. 3.

imported, this it was they had to do ; to abstract their minds and hearts from the things of this earth, and place them upon the things of a higher region, and (as it is afterwards expressed in this same context, which we were considering before) to have our conversation (or citizenship) in heaven, whence we look for the Saviour,^a &c. ; that is, as our chief interests and privileges are above, to have our thoughts and the powers of our souls chiefly exercised upon that blessed and glorious state, which state is the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus : ^b—it being the scope and import of his call to us, and the very design of his sufferings on the cross, to draw up a people from earth to heaven ; whence, therefore, they that under this call still mind earthly things, are said to be enemies to the cross of Christ.^c And it was because he was so willing to comply with the design of the cross, that he made no difficulty to endure all the hardship of it, in order to attain this glorious fruit which he reckoned should accrue from it,—even more of a raised heavenly mind. Hence it was, that we find him groaning, as one under a heavy weight, to be clothed upon with the heavenly house, and to have mortality swallowed up of life,^d—because God had “wrought him to this self-same thing.” So bent and determined his spirit was towards the blessedness of the future state, that, although he could bear patiently

^a Phil. iii. 20. ^b Ver. 14. ^c Ver. 18, 19.

^d 2 Cor. v. 4, 5.

the delay, he could not but desire most earnestly to be there.

We see how the temper of the primitive Christians was as to this and the other world, in those days when the spirit was plentifully poured out. They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing they had in heaven a far better and an enduring substance.^a—Heaven signified much with them, and this world very little. They looked not to the things that were seen and temporal, but to the things unseen and eternal.^b They lived as pilgrims and strangers on earth, despised its pleasures riches and honours, endured all manner of hardships and tortures, not accepting deliverance, because they were taken up in the pursuit of the better country, had respect to the recompense of reward, and expected a part in the better resurrection.

It is a delightful thing to the spirit of a man, when he is sensibly disentangled and at liberty from the cares, desires, griefs, and fears, that were wont to enwrap his heart,—when he finds the bonds and snares loosed, which bound him down to this earth, and feels himself moving upwards, out of that darkness and death that possessed his soul, into that upper region of light, purity, and peace, to which his spirit is still gradually more and more connaturalized day by day,—when heaven, in respect of its pure holiness and calm serenity, its rest and blessedness, is now grown familiar to him, and his very element.

^a Heb. x. 34. ^b 2 Cor. iv. 18.

God is therefore to be delighted in, through this delectable gracious communication intervening, by which he now frames the soul according to his own image, and gives a heart after his own heart, that is, such as is suitable to him, and as he would have it be. This is the only way, in which it is possible for one to delight in God, namely, by having a good frame of spirit communicated to him, and inwrought. Then is a man in a happy state, when God has by his own spirit made him, what by his word he requires him to be. Now is he composed to delights and blessedness, being by the same workmanship created in Christ Jesus both to good works and to the best of enjoyments. How happy is that soul, in which the true matter of delight is become an implanted thing, whose temper is now in some sort become to it both a law and a reward! Surely this is one great part of what an enlightened soul would most earnestly desire. O that I were more like God, more perfectly framed according to his holy will!

But yet this natural consequence is little understood. And the common ignorance of this has made it necessary to insist the more largely on this part of the delectable communication, wherein God offers himself to his people's enjoyment. For from the not knowing or not considering this way of enjoying him, a two-fold mistake, the one of very dangerous the other of uncomfortable tendency, has arisen.

1. Some have thought that they have enjoyed God, when they have not; having only had their

imaginations gratified by certain false or ineffectual notions of him, in which they have rested, and placed the sum of their religion and happiness; and never aiming to have their spirits reformed according to that pure and holy image and model, which he has represented in the gospel of his Son, the impression whereof is *Christ formed in us*.

2. Others have thought that they have not enjoyed God, when they have; supposing, there was no enjoyment of him, but what consisted in the rapturous transporting apprehension and persuasion of his particular love to them; or overlooking all that work which he has wrought in their souls, as if it were to be accounted nothing; or not allowing themselves to reflect on any thing in themselves, but what was still amiss; or not applying themselves to improve the principles already implanted, which are of a nature to yield fruits of most pleasant relish.

CHAPTER V.

Manifestation by God to the Soul. Manifestation of his Love. Manifestation by the Holy Spirit.

THIS divine communication is delectable, as it includes in it the manifestation of God's love to the soul in particular.

We do not hereby intend an enthusiastical assurance, or such a manifestation of the love of God to the soul as excludes any reference to his external revelation and the exercise of our own enlightened reason thereupon. But as, in the other parts of the divine communication, his external revelation has the place of an instrument, whereby he effects the work inwardly done upon the mind and heart, so we are to account it is as to this part of it also, that is, he inwardly manifests the same thing which is virtually contained in his gospel-revelation, considered in that reference which it has on the present state of the soul. For that outward revelation must needs be understood to signify diversely to particular persons, as their state may be diverse; as, when it says, "The things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, God hath prepared for them that love him."^a To a person, who does indeed truly love God, it virtually says, all these things are prepared for thee; to one who does not love God, it can only be understood to say, all these things may be thine, i. e. if thou shalt love him: but, inasmuch as a conditional promise, when the condition is performed, is equivalent to an absolute, these words do as truly import this sense to one who loves God, as if they were directed to him in particular; as truly I say, supposing the person do truly love God, but not so clearly, or with the same evidence: for this truth (supposing

^a 1 Cor. ii. 9.

it a truth) "I do sincerely love God," is not so evident as the other, "That such preparation is made for them that love:" this is expressly contained in the word of God, the other is not so, but to be collected only by self-inspection, and observation of the bent and tenor of my spirit and way toward God.

We speak not here of what God can do, but what he doth. Who can doubt but as God can, if he please, imprint on the mind the whole system of necessary truth, and on the heart the entire frame of holiness, without the help of an external revelation, so he can imprint this particular persuasion also without any outward means? Nor do we speak of what he more rarely does, but of what he does ordinarily, or what his more usual course and way of procedure is, in dealing with the spirits of men. The supreme power binds not its own hands. We may be sure, the inward testimony of the Spirit never is opposite to the outward testimony of his gospel (which is the Spirit's testimony also); and therefore it never says to an unholy man, an enemy to God, "thou art in a reconciled and pardoned state." But we cannot be sure, he never speaks or suggests things to the spirits of men but by the external testimony, so as to make use of that as the means of informing them of what he has to impart; nay, we know he sometimes has imparted things (as to prophets and the sacred penmen) without any external means, and excited suitable affections in them, to the import of the things imparted and made known.

I do not believe it can ever be proved, that he never immediately testifies his own special love to holy souls, without the intervention of some part of his external word, made use of as a present instrument to that purpose, or that he always does it in the way of methodical reasoning therefrom. Nor do I think that the experience of Christians can signify much to the deciding of the matter. For,—besides that this or that or a third person's experience cannot conclude any thing against a fourth's, and it is likely that few can distinctly tell, how it has been with them in this matter, that is, what way or method has been taken with them in begetting a present persuasion, at this or that time, of God's peculiar love to them,—his dealings with persons, even the same persons at different times, may be so various, his illapses at some times may have been so sudden and surprising, the motions of thoughts are so quick, the observation which persons usually have of what is transacted in their own spirits is so indistinct, and they may be so much taken up with the thing itself as less to mind the way and order of doing it, that we may suppose little is to be gathered thence, towards the settling of a stated rule in this case. Nor is the matter of such moment, that we need either be curious in enquiring, or positive in determining about it,—it being once understood and settled as a principle, that God never says any thing, in this matter, by his Spirit to the hearts of men, repugnant to what the same Spirit has said in his word, that is, that he never tes-

tifies to any person by his Spirit, that he is accepted and beloved by him, who may at the same time be concluded, by his public and external constitutions in his word, to be in a state of non-acceptance and disfavour. Hereby the most momentous danger in this matter is avoided; for if that principle is settled, enough is done to preclude the vain boasts of such as may be apt to pretend highly to great manifestations of divine love, while they carry with them manifest proofs of an unsanctified heart, and are under the power of unmortified reigning sin. That principle admitted will convince them, that their boasted manifestations only manifest their own ignorance, pride, and vanity; or that they proceed only from their heated imagination or from satanical illusion, designed to lull them asleep in sin, and lead them blindfold to perdition.

In whatever way the Spirit of God manifests his love, it is not to be doubted, but that there is such a thing in itself very necessary, and to be attained and sought after; and that it is highly delectable, when he vouchsafes it. That there is such a thing to be sought after, as a communicable privilege and favour to holy souls, is evident enough from multitudes of scriptures. Those that have been occasionally mentioned, in speaking of the way of his doing it, need not be repeated;—to which we may add, what we find is added to those above recited words, “eye hath not seen, &c. the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” namely, “God

hath revealed them to us by his Spirit,"^a And that Spirit gives to the lovers of God a clearer view not only of the things prepared for them, so that their nature might be more distinctly understood, but also of their own propriety and interest in them; "now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, that we may know the things that are freely given us of God."^b They are revealed by the Spirit, not only as pleasing objects in themselves but as gifts, as the evidences and issues of divine love, and their own proper portion by the bequest of that love. Nor is this the work of the Spirit only as inditing the scriptures, but it is such a work as helps to the spiritual discerning of these things, whereto the natural man is not competent, though capable of reading the Scriptures as well as other men. And what shall we make of those words of our Saviour, when, having told his disciples that he would pray the Father, who should give them another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, that he might abide with them for ever,^c he adds, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you,"^d that is, as is plain, by that Spirit: and then shortly after subjoins, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."^e Here is an express promise of this love-

^a 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. ^b Ver. 12. ^c John xiv. 16.

^d Ver. 18. ^e Ver. 21.

manifestation, whereof we speak, by the Spirit (the Comforter mentioned above,) not to those particular persons only, to whom he was then directing his speech, or to those only of that time and age, but indefinitely to them who should love Christ, and keep his commandments:—which is again repeated in other words of the same import, “If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”^a So that all who love Christ and keep his words, have encouragement to expect such a manifestation as is most aptly expressive of love, and such converse as imports most of kindness and endearment,—the same thing, no doubt, as that “shedding abroad of the love of God in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost given to them.” And since we have so plain and repeated mention of the seal, the earnest, the first-fruits of the Spirit, what can these expressions be understood to import but a confirmation of the love of God, or assuring and satisfying evidences and pledges thereof.

That there should be such an inward manifestation of divine love, superadded to the public and external declaration of it (which is only made indefinitely to persons so and so characterized,) the exigency of the case required; that is, so far as it was necessary that his love should be distinctly understood and apprehended, it was necessary that this course should be taken

^a John xiv. 23.

to make it so. A mere external revelation was not sufficient to that end; our own unassisted reasonings therefrom were not sufficient. As other truths have not their due and proper impression merely by our rational reception, (be they never so plain,) without that holy sanctifying influence, before insisted on; so this truth also, of God's love to this person in particular, hath not its force and weight, its efficacy and fruit, answerable to the design of its discovery, unless it be applied and urged home on the soul by a communicated influence of the Spirit for this purpose,—many times not so far as to overcome and silence tormenting doubts, fears and anguish of spirit in reference hereto, and, where that is done, not sufficient to work off deadness, drowsiness, indisposition to the doing of God cheerful service, nor sufficient to excite and stir up love, gratitude, admiration and praise. How many, who have learned not to make light of the love of God as the most do, who reckon that in his favour is life, to whom it is not an indifferent thing whether they be accepted or no, who cannot trifle with matters of everlasting consequence, who are not enough Atheists and Sceptics to permit all to a mad hazard,—walk mournfully from day to day, with sunk dejected spirits, full of anxiety even unto agonies, under the clear external discovery of God's love to persons of that character, whereof they really are! Such as observe them, judge their case plain, and every one thinks well of them but themselves;

their mouths are sometimes stopped by such as discourse the matter with them, but their hearts are not quieted: or, if they sometimes are in a degree, yet the same doubts and fears return with the former importunity, the same work is still to be done, it is but rolling the returning stone; and all human endeavours to apply and bring home the comforts proper and suitable to their case, prove fruitless and ineffectual; nothing can be fastened upon them; they refuse to be comforted, while God himself does not create (that which is the fruit of his own lips) peace, peace,—while, as yet, they are not filled with joy and peace in believing, and made to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.^a It is plain, there needs a more learned tongue than any human one, to speak a word in season to such weary ones.^b How many, again, have spirits overcome with deadness and sloth, under a settled (perhaps not altogether mistaken but more notional) apprehension of the same love! They have only that assurance which arises, it may be, not from a false but the single testimony of their own spirits,—at least unaccompanied with other than the ordinary help of the Spirit, not very distinguishable from the workings of their own; they have reasoned themselves (perhaps regularly, by observing the rule and the habitual bent of their own spirits) into an opinion of their own good estate, so that they are not vexed with doubts and fears, as

^a Rom. xv. 13.^b Isa. l. 4.

some others are. But they do not discover to others, nor can discern in themselves any degree of life and vigour, of heavenliness and spirituality, of love to God, or zeal for him, proportionable to their high expectations from him, or to the great import of this thing—to *be beloved of God*: there is no discernible growth or spiritual improvement to be found in them. How remote is their temper from that of the primitive Christians! It is apparent what is yet wanting; they are not edified (as those were), walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.^a

Wherefore the matter is plain, there is such a thing as an effectual overpowering communication of the Holy Ghost for the manifesting of the love of God, of great necessity and importance to Christians, which may be had and ought to be diligently sought after.

CHAPTER VI.

Of the Delight or Joy arising from the Communication of the Love of God to the Soul of Man. Cautions necessary upon this Subject.

THIS manifestation of the love of God, communicated to Christians by the Holy Ghost, is infinitely delectable. If we consider the matter

^a Acts ix. 31.

represented to us thereby, the love of God, how transporting would the thought of it be to an enlightened mind! No one, whose nature is not overrun with barbarism, would entertain the discovery of the harmless innocent love (though it were not profitable to us) even of a creature like ourselves, otherwise than with complacency. Men are pleased to behold love expressing itself towards them, in a child, in a poor neighbour, in an impotent servant, even in their horse or their dog. The greatest prince observes with delight the affection of the meanest peasants among his subjects; much more would they please themselves, if they had occasion to take notice of any remarkable expression of his favourable respect to them: but how unspeakably more, if he vouchsafe to express it by gracious intimacies and by condescending familiarities! How doth that person bless himself, how doth his spirit triumph, and his imagination luxuriate in delightful thoughts and expectations, who is in his own heart assured he hath the favour of his prince! With what complacency are inward friends wont to receive the mutual expressions of each other's love; and can it be thought, the love of the great and blessed God should signify less?

How great things are comprehended in this:—The Lord of heaven and earth hath a kindness towards me, and bears me good will! How grateful is the relish of this apprehension, both in respect of what it imports in itself, and of what it is the root and cause of!

True ingenuousness of nature values love for itself. If such a one will think of me—if I shall have a place in his remembrance—if he will count me among his friends,—this we are apt to be pleased with. Tokens are sent and interchanged among friends, not only to express love, but to preserve and cherish it, and keep up a mutual remembrance among them. And as there is a great pleasure conceived, in receiving such expressions or pledges of love from a friend,—not so much for the value of the thing sent, as of what it signifies, and because it is the token of his love and of his kind remembrance,—so is there no less pleasure in giving and sending than in receiving: because hereby, as we gratify our own love by giving it a kind of vent this way, so we foresee how we shall thereby excite theirs; which we put a value upon, even abstracting from any advantage we expect therefrom. How dignifying is the love of God! How honourable a thing to be his favourite! The Apostle seems to put a mighty stress on this, when he utters those emphatic words, “wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him;”^a as if he had said, “neither life nor death, neither being in the body nor out of it, signify any thing to me; they are indifferent things in comparison of this honour, that he may accept me,—that I may be pleasing to him, and gracious in his eyes,—that I may stand well in his thoughts, and that he may bear a kind and favourable regard to me.”

This is a thing in itself delightful, not only as it is honourable, but as it is strange and wonderful. Things that are in themselves grateful, are so much the more so, for their being somewhat surprising, and above all our expectation. I say, supposing they have an antecedent gratefulness in them, (for otherwise we know there are also very unwelcome wonders, and which are so much the more dreadful, because they are surprising and unexpected,) it is greatly heightened by their being quite out of the road of all our thoughts, great things that we looked not for. And who would have looked for such a thing as this,—that the Lord of glory should place his love on such a worm as I! This is set off with the more advantage, because the same light, that represents to a soul God's love, also discovers to it, at the same time, its own deformity and unloveliness. And then how taking and overcoming is the thought,—I, impure wretch! lost apostate creature, one of a race and crew of rebels, who was confederate with rebellious men against him, yea, in a combination with those revolted creatures the devils, now taken (I know not why) into a state of acceptance and favour with him! And his love is declared to be towards me! Why towards me—in myself so vile! And such love! the love of a holy glorious God, towards one in whose very nature was such wickedness! Why towards me rather than others, not naturally more vile than I? How can this be thought

on without crying out, O wonderful! O the depths, breadths, lengths, and heights of this love, that so infinitely passeth knowledge! And here the greater the wonder, the greater is also the delight.

The effects also of this love are great in the eyes of the soul, according to the apprehended greatness of their cause. If we indeed were to form conceptions of these things by our own light and conduct, our way were to follow the ascending order, and go up from the effects till we reach the cause; but he can, if he pleases, in the cause present to us the effects, and magnify them in our eyes, by giving us to see to how great and magnificent a cause they owe themselves. Now, shall we know whence all hath proceeded that he hath done for us. Again must the transported soul admiringly cry out, "I now see, whence it was that he gave his Son,—because he so loved the world; why he came and bled and died, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood. What a lustre does that love cast upon those sufferings and performances! I see, why he sent his gospel to me, why so convincing awakening words were often spoken in my ear, why he so earnestly strove with me by his Spirit, why he gave not over till he had overcome my heart, why he humbled, melted, broke me; why he drew so strongly, bound me so fast to himself, in safe and happy bonds; why he shone into my mind with that mild and efficacious light, transformed my whole soul, stamped it with his holy image,

and marked me out for his own. These are now great things, when I behold their glorious mighty cause!"

In this same cause are all the great effects to be seen, which are yet to be brought about by it. They are seen as very great. His continued presence and conduct, which he affords to his own through this world,—that constant fellowship, which they expect him to keep with them,—the guidance and support which they look for,—in his love these appear great things. And now heaven sounds no more as an empty name; it looks not like a languid faint shadow: somewhat can be apprehended of it that imports substance, when it is understood to be a state of rest and blessedness in the communion of the God of love, and intended as the last product and expression of his love!

They are seen as most sure and certain. Such love, now manifested and apprehended, leaves no place for doubtful thoughts and suspicious misgivings. There is no fear, that this love intends to impose upon us, or mock us with the representation of an imaginary heaven; or that it will fail to do what can be expected from it, to bring us to the real one.

How pleasant is it now to behold the great and sure products of this mighty love! its admirable designs and projects, as they appear in the gospel revelation, now illustrated by divine light! It cannot but be an unspeakable pleasure, which such a discovery will carry with it, when we

thus behold the matter itself that is discovered and offered to our view.

It must be a very considerable additional pleasure, that will arise from the nature and kind of this manifestation, as being, in general, made by himself. It is too plain and sad a truth, that men have unhappily learned to diminish God to themselves, and make every thing of him seem little. But when he represents his love himself (who but God can represent the love of God? —He only can tell the story of his own love,) that evil is provided against: He will manifest it so as it shall be understood, and set it off to the best advantage. He will make it known, how great a thing it is to be beloved of him. And when he gives that blessed salutation, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured!" "O thou that art greatly beloved," he will withal bespeak and procure a suitable entertainment of it. Hence, particularly, it will be most incomparably bright and lightsome in respect of any representation we have had of the love of God any other way: most immediate also, that is at least so as not to be only made by some external testimony given out many an age ago, (out of which we are left to pick what we can, and to construe or misconstrue it as our own judgment serves us,) but so as that (if he use such an instrument) he animates it, puts a soul into it, leaves it not as a dead spiritless letter, and applies it himself to the purpose he intends, and immediately himself touches the heart by it.

The manifestation will also be most facile, and easily sliding in upon us; so that we are put to no more pains than to behold the light, which the sun casts about us and upon us. Whatever labour it was necessary for us to use before, in our searches and enquiries into the state of our case, there is now no more.

It will be most efficacious. It makes its own way, scatters clouds, drives away darkness, makes doubts and misgiving thoughts vanish, pierces with a quick and sudden energy like lightning, and strikes through the mind into the heart; there sheds abroad this love, and diffuses its sweet refreshing savour; actuates spiritual sense, makes the soul taste how gracious the Lord is, and relish the sweetness of his love; puts all its powers into a suitable motion, and excites affection, so as to make the soul capable of interchanging love with love.

In all these respects, this manifestation of love cannot but be very delectable; and they who have not found it to be so, will yet apprehend that it must be so, if they have found and experienced the cravings of their own hearts directed this way, and can upon enquiry find this among the things they would fain have from God; "O that I might be satisfied of his love! that I might know his good will towards me!" For to such cravings must this delight at least be commensurate. But, to them that are indifferent in this matter and unconcerned, to whom the love of God is a fancy or a trifle, all this will be as tasteless as the white of an egg.

Before we pass from this head, it is needful to add these few things by way of caution.

1. When we say this is of great necessity, we mean not that it is simply necessary ; we think it not so necessary, that a Christian cannot be without it, that is, as a Christian. But it is necessary to his well-being and more comfortable being, and to his more lively and fruitful walking and acting in his christian course.

2. The way of God's dealing herein is with great latitude and variety ; he having reserved to himself, by the tenor of his covenant, a liberty to afford or suspend it, to give it in a greater degree or less degree, as, in sovereignty and infinite wisdom, he pleases and sees fit to determine.

3. It may not be sought after with so absolute and peremptory an expectation, as those things may that are necessary to the holding of souls in life ; but with much resignation, submission, and deference of the matter to the divine good pleasure, such as shall neither import disesteem of it nor impatience in the want of it.

4. It ought to be less esteemed than the heart-rectifying communication which is impressive of God's image, and whereby we are made partakers of his holiness. This last proceeds more entirely from pure love to God, for himself ; the other proceeds more from self-love, tends more directly to the pleasing of us than to the pleasing of God, and is necessary but to our well or better being. The heart-rectifying communication is necessary simply to our very being in Christ.

5. It is a great mistake to think, that God is not otherwise to be enjoyed than in this way of more express testification of his love ; as if you could have no enjoyment of a friend, otherwise than by his often repeating to you, “ I love you, I love you, indeed I love you.”

6. It is a much greater mistake to place the sum of religion here ; or that any should make it the whole of their business to seek this, or to talk of it ; or should think God does nothing for them, worth their acknowledgment and solemn thanksgiving, while he does not this.

7. Most of all, it is a mistake that any should reckon the first thing they have to do, when they begin to mind religion, is to believe God’s particular love to them, and that he has elected them, pardoned them, and will certainly save them. So, too many most dangerously impose upon themselves, and, before any true humiliation or renovation of heart or transaction with the Redeemer, set themselves to believe this particular love of God, and seek help from God more strongly to believe it : they cry to themselves peace, peace, and think all is well ; take their liberty, humour themselves, live as they list, and say, that for so long a time they have had assurance of their salvation. The father of lies must needs be the author of this faith,—for it is a lie which they believe, that is, that they are pardoned and accepted of God is a downright lie, repugnant to his word and the tenor of his covenant.

8. For the most part, if Christians upon whom

the renewing work of the Holy Ghost, in that former communication, has in some degree taken place, do yet want that degree of this also which is necessary to free them from very afflicting doubts and fears, and to enable them to a cheerful and lively walking with God,—it is to be reckoned their own fault. Either they put too much stress upon it (too little minding his public declarations in his word,) or unduly seek it, or unseasonably expect it; or they put too little stress upon it, and expect or seek it not; or by their indulged carnality, earthliness and vanity of spirit they render themselves incapable of it; or by their careless and too licentious walking, or their resisting or neglecting holy motions, they grieve that Spirit that would comfort them. For though the restraint of such more pleasant communications may proceed sometimes from an unaccountable sovereignty, that owes no reason to us of its arbitrary way of giving or withholding favours, yet we are to know and consider, that there is such a thing as paternal and domestic justice proper to God's own family, and which, as the head and father of it, he exerciseth therein : whereby (though he do not exercise it alike at all times) it seems meet to his infinite wisdom to awaken and rouse the sloth, or rebuke the folly, or check the vanity, or chastise the wantonness of his offending children, and that even in this way, by retiring himself, becoming more reserved, withdrawing the more discernible tokens of his presence, and leaving them sometimes to the torture of their own conjectures of what worse

thing may ensue. Herein he may design not only reformation to the delinquents, but instruction to others and even vindication to himself. For however these his dealings with men's spirits are in themselves (as they must needs be) secret, and such as come not under the immediate notice of other men, yet somewhat consequential thereto does more openly appear, and becomes obvious to the common observation of serious Christians, with whom such persons converse; that is, not only such as languish under the more remarkable terrors of their spirits, and are visibly, as it were, consuming in their own flame, (of which sort there occur sometimes very monitory and instructive examples,) but even such also as are deprived of his quickening influence, and have only somewhat remaining in them that is ready to die, who are pining away in their iniquities, and sunk deep into deadness and carnality, (for his comforting communication is also quickening, and he doth not use to withhold it as it is quickening, and continue it as it is comforting,) carry upon them very discernible tokens of divine displeasure; and the evils and distempers, under which their spirits lie wasting, are both their sin and punishment. Their own wickedness corrects them, and their backsliding reproves them; and that reproof, being observable, at the same time warns others, and does that right to God, as to let it be seen that he makes a difference, and refuses the intimacies with more negligent professors of his name, which he vouchsafes to have with

some others, who make it their business and study to carry themselves acceptably towards him, and are more manifestly serious, humble, diligent, obedient observers of his will. If therefore we find not what we have found in this kind,—however the matter may possibly be resolvable into the divine pleasure, (as it is more likely to be, in the case of such desertions as are accompanied with terror, when no notorious apostacy or scandalous wickedness has gone before,) it is both safe and modest and obvious also to suspect that such delinquencies, as before mentioned, are designed to be animadverted upon, and that the love has been injured which is now not manifested as heretofore.

9. Such a degree of the manifestation of the love of God, as is necessary to a comfortable serving of God in our stations, being afforded, such superadded degrees whereby the soul is in frequent raptures and transports, are not to be thought withheld penally in any peculiar or remarkable respect, or otherwise than as it may be understood some way a penalty *not to be already perfectly blessed*. For it is certain, that such rapturous sensations or the want of them are not the distinguishing characters of the more grown; strong, and excellent Christians, or of those who are more infirm and of a meaner and lower pitch and stature. Those ecstasical emotions, although they have much of a sensible delectation in them, and though they may in part proceed from the best and most excellent cause, do yet, if they be frequent (which would

signify an aptitude thereto,) import somewhat of diminution in their subject; that is, they imply that the persons who are more disposed this way, are of a temper not so well fixed and composed but more volatile and airy;—which yet does not intimate, that the chief cause and author of those motions is therefore mean and ignoble,—nay, it argues nothing to the contrary but that the Holy Spirit itself may be the supreme cause of them. For admitting it to be so, it does not alter men's natural tempers and complexions, but so acts on them that they retain notwithstanding, and express upon occasion, what was peculiar to their temper. The work and office of the Holy Ghost, in its special communication, is to alter and new mould men in respect of their *moral* dispositions, not those which are strictly and purely *natural*: the subject is in this regard the same as it was, and whatsoever is received is received according to the disposition of that; it gives a tincture to what supervenes, and is implanted thereinto; whence the same degree of such communicated influence will not so discernibly move some tempers, as it does others,—as the same quantity of fire will not so soon put solid wood into a flame, as it will light straw. That some men therefore are less sensibly and passionately moved with the great things of God and even with the discovery of his love, than some others, does not argue them to have less of the Spirit, but more of that temper which better comports with deeper judgment and a calm and sober consideration of

things. The unaptness of some men's affections to strong and fervent emotion does indeed arise from a stupid inconsiderateness; of some others, from a more profound consideration, by which the deeper things sink, and the more they pierce even into the inmost centre of the soul, the less they move the surface. And though I do not think the saying of that heathen applicable to this case, "It is a wise man's part to admire nothing,"—for here is matter enough in this theme, the love of God, to justify the highest wonder possible, and not to admire in such a case is most stupidly irrational,—yet I conceive the admiration as well as other affections of more considering persons is more inward, calm, sedate, and dispassionate, and thence is more solid and rational; and the pleasure that attends it is the more deep and lasting. The fervour which ensues upon the apprehended love of God, prompting them to such service as is suitable to a state of devotedness to his interest, is more intense and durable; of the others, more flashy and inconstant.

10. But to shut up this discourse: They that have more transporting apprehensions of the love of God, should take heed of despising them who have them not in just the same kind, or do not express them in the same seraphic strains. They that have them not, should take heed of censuring those that with humble modesty, upon just occasion, discover and own what they do experience in this kind; much less should they conclude, that because they find them not, there

is therefore no such to be found,—which cynical humour is too habitual to such tempers. If they do fancy such to be a weaker sort of persons, they may be sincere for all that. It ought to be considered of whom it was said, “That he would not quench the smoking flax.” The grace and spirit of Christ ought to be revered in the various appearances thereof; “Whether we be sober or beside ourselves—the love of Christ constraineth us;”^a—so diversely may the apprehensions of that love work in the same person, much more in divers persons. Christians should be shy of making themselves standards to one another; which they that do, discover more pride and self-conceit than acquaintance with God, and more admiration of themselves than of his love.

CHAPTER VII.

Of the Nature of holy Delight in God. Of the Rest of the Soul in God.

WE are next to say somewhat briefly of the delight itself. Nor shall we be herein so curious as to distinguish (which some do) delight and joy. The distinction, wont to be assigned, cannot, it is plain, hold here so as to make the former of these signify a brutish affection only, and the

^a 2 Cor. v. 13, 14.

latter proper to rational nature; nor is there any such propriety belonging to the words; but they may be rendered (as indeed they are used in Scripture) promiscuously, either in reference to the matter of intellectual or sensitive complacency, and either of a reasonable or unreasonable being. We take these therefore to signify substantially the same thing, and *delight* to be entirely all one with *joy*: that is, there is not any the highest degree of joy, which may not fitly enough be comprehended under the name of delight, when it is placed (as here it is required to be) upon the blessed God.

Let us now consider, what it is we are called to: and how we are to reckon ourselves called to it.

1. That we may shew, what we are called to.—Having, in this general account, spoken only of human delight, or of delight as it is to be found among men, it will now be necessary to distinguish this into that which is merely natural, and that which is holy. And when we thus distinguish, it is to be understood that by *natural* we mean what is within the sphere of nature in its present corrupted state; otherwise, what was natural to man (taken in a large sense) included holiness in it; and so, the addition of holiness does but make up purely natural delight, as it was at first. But, as the case now is, the distinction is necessary.

The latter of these only (holy delight) will be the subject of our following discourse; as being only suitable to the blessed object whereon it

must terminate, and only capable of being applied thereto.

When our delight is to be placed and set on God, this must be understood as presupposed, namely, that it be purified, drained from the pollutions and impure tinctures which it has derived from our vitiated natures, and further contracted by our converse with impure, mean, and vile things.

Unholy love declines God; and indeed it is unholy, inasmuch as it does so. Whence, therefore, it is as impossible it should be set on God, while it remains unholy, as that it should be another thing from itself, and yet be still what it was. Holiness, coming upon the whole soul even upon all its faculties and powers, therein spreads itself unto its delight also. Delight in God is not the work of an unholy heart.

As holiness consists in a right disposition of heart towards God...in a divine nature participated from him, conforming to him, and tending towards him...and is in itself so delightful a thing, it may thence be seen what holy delight is, or wherein the holiness of it stands.

It must to this purpose be considered that this holy delight is twofold, according to a twofold consideration of the delectable object. All delight in God supposes, as has been said, some communication from him. That communication is either of light—whereby his nature and attributes are in some measure known, or of operative influence—whereby his image is impressed, and the soul framed according to his will.

And so it is partly mental or notional (I mean not merely notional, but such as is fitted to beget a correspondent impression on the soul, and not to engage it in speculations concerning him only,) and partly real, that actually begets such an impression itself. It is partly such as may be understood, and partly such as may be felt; the manifestation of his love partly belongs to the one of these, and partly to the other. Answerably hereto, the delight that is taken in him is either more open and explicit,—wherein a person reflects upon, and takes notice of his own act, and whereupon it is exercised,—or more latent and unobserved, when the delight lies folded up in other acts and dispositions, which have another more principal design, though that also is involved in them.

In the former way, the soul delights in God more directly, applying itself thereto on purpose, and bending the mind and heart intentionally thereto,—its present views of him having that very design and aim. In the latter way, it delights in him rather collaterally,—when its present action (as well as the disposition leading to it) has another more direct scope and aim, and the delight only adheres to the act as being in itself delightful; as for instance, the acts of repentance, trust, self-denial, &c. which have another end than delight, though that insinuates into them.

The former of these may be called contemplative delight,—the soul solacing itself in a *pleasant meditation* of God, whereby its delight

in him is excited and stirred up. The latter (understanding *sense* spiritually, as it belongs to the *new creature*,^a) may be called *sensitive delight*; whereby the soul, as it were, tastes how gracious the Lord is. And though it does this by the other also, yet the distinction holds in respect of the way wherein the delight is begotten and begun, if not in respect of the thing itself begotten, or wherein the matter ends.

In the former way, the soul more expressly reflects upon its own present exercise, which it directly intends. In the latter, it may not reflect expressly either upon its actual delight which it hath, nor actually consider God as the object that yields it that pleasure;—as I may be delighted by the pleasant taste of this or that food, without considering what the thing is I am feeding on, and not having distinct reflection on the pleasure I take therein.

The former is less durable, and sooner apt to vanish upon the cessation of the present act, like the delight of the eye. The latter is more permanent (as that of the taste) and habitual; such as is the pleasure of any thing, whereof one has a continued possession,—as of a confirmed state and habit of health, or of the riches, dignities, pleasant accommodations which belong to any one's settled condition,—of which he has that continual enjoyment which insensibly forms his spirit, raises and keeps it up to a pitch suitable to his condition, though he have not every day or hour distinct formed thoughts of

^a Phil. i. 9.

them, and is not often in that contemplative transport with Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?"

Both these are holy delight, or delight in God. In both whereof may be seen, added to the general nature of delight, a holy nature as the principle, inferring a powerful steady determination of the heart towards God, as the object and end which it ultimately tends to and terminates upon: though, in the former way of delighting in God, the soul tends towards him more directly, in the latter (according as the acts may be to which the delight adheres,) more obliquely, and through several things that may be intermediate to that final and ultimate object. And both these may fitly be understood to be within the meaning of this text;—which therefore we shall now consider apart and severally, but very briefly.

We begin with the latter of them. For though the former have, in some respect, an excellency in it above the latter, yet as the progress of nature in other creatures is by way of ascent, from what is more imperfect, to what is perfecter and more excellent: so is it with the communicated divine nature in the new creature, which puts itself forth first in more imperfect operations,—the buddings, as it were, of that tree of life, which has its more florid blossoms and at length its ripe and fragrant fruit; or, (to come nearer the case,) inasmuch as the latter *sort of delight* has more in it of the exercise of *spiritual sense*, the other more of spiritual reason,

(since human creatures, that have natures capable of both sorts of functions, first exercise sense, and, by a slower and more gradual process, come on to acts of ratiocination afterwards,) so it is here,—the soul, in which the divine life has taken place, first exercises itself in spiritual sensations; so that though, in the matter of delight, it is not destitute of the grateful relishes of things truly and spiritually delectable, yet the more formed and designed acts of holy delectation, in the highest object thereof, distinctly apprehended and pitched upon for that purpose, follow in their season; and these are preparations, and the essays of the new creature gradually and more indistinctly putting forth itself.

If therefore it be enquired, wherein the delight of this more imperfect sort consist, I answer, in the soul's sensation and relish of sweetness,—in the holy quickening communications of God to it, by which he first forms it for himself,—and in the operations which it is hereby enabled to put forth towards him, while it is in the infancy or childhood of its christian state.

Nor, while we say the delight of this kind more properly belongs to the younger and more immature state of christianity, do we thereby intend wholly to appropriate or confine it to that state. For as, when a child is grown up to the capacity of exercising reason, it does not then give over to use sense, but continues the exercise of it also in its adult state, even as long as the person lives, (only in its infancy and childhood its life *is more entirely* a life of sense, though there are

early buddings of reason, that soon come to be intermingled therein,) so it is in this case also ; that is, though there are sensations of delight and pleasure in religion, (and those more quick, confirmed and strong in more grown Christians,) yet these sensations are more single and more unaccompanied with the exercise of spiritual reason and judgment, and less come in that way with Christians in their minority, than with others, or with themselves afterwards.

That, therefore, which we are to understand ourselves called to, under the name of delighting in God, is, the keeping of our souls open to divine influences and communications,—thirsting after them, praying and waiting for them,—endeavouring to improve them, and co-operate with them, and to stir up ourselves to such exercises of religion, as are most suitable to our present state, together with an allowing and applying ourselves to stay and taste, in our progress and course, the sweetness and delightfulness of those communications and operations, whereof we have any present experience. For instance ; when we find God at work with us and graciously dealing with our spirits, in order to humble them, to break and melt them under a sense of sin, to incline and turn them towards himself, to draw them to a closure with his Son the Redeemer, to a resignation and surrender of ourselves to him, upon the terms of his covenant and law of grace,—and when afterwards we find him framing our hearts, to a course of holy walking and conversation, to the denial of ungodliness.

and worldly lusts, to a sober, righteous, and godly life in this present world, to the exercises of piety, sobriety, righteousness, charity, mercy,—and now perhaps this or the like heavenly dictate occurs to us, “Delight thyself in the Lord,”—what does it import? what must we understand it to say or signify to us? Though this that has been mentioned, is not all that it signifies (as will be shewn hereafter,) yet thus much we must understand it does signify and say to us:—“Thy only true delights are to be found in a course of religion, they are not to be expected from this world or thy former sinful course, but in exercising thyself to godliness, in receiving and complying with the divine discoveries recommended to thee in the gospel, and the influences of life and grace, which readily flow in upon the soul that hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and by which thou mayest be framed after the good and holy and acceptable will of God. Herein thou shalt find such pleasures and delights entertaining thy soul, thou wilt have no cause to envy wicked men their sensual delights, which they find in their sinful way—if thou wilt but observe what thou findest, and exercise thy sense to discern between good and evil,—and set thyself to consider, whether there be not more satisfying purer relishes of pleasure in mortifying the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof, in denying thyself, in dying to this world, in living to God, in minding the things of another world, in giving up thyself

to the several exercises of a holy life, (watching, praying, meditating, &c.) in trusting in the Lord with all thy heart, in doing all the good thou canst in thy place and station,—in letting thy light so shine before men, that they seeing thy good works may glorify thy Father which is in heaven,—in contentment with that thou enjoyest, in patience under what thou sufferest in this world, in doing justice, in loving righteousness, and walking humbly with thy God,—than ever the vanishing pleasures of sin did or can afford.”

Thus into these two things may be summed up all, which delighting in God imports:—1. The applying ourselves to those things, by the help of God’s own communicated influence, wherein the matter of delight lies. 2. The reflecting upon the things themselves that are so delightful, and tasting actually the delectableness of them. And surely, if such words “Delight thyself in the Lord” say to us all this, they do not say nothing; nor do they say any thing impertinent, either to their own native import, or our state and condition in this world.

We proceed to speak of the more explicit delight in God, and shall therein consider the nature and modification of it.

1. Its nature—which, from what hath been said of delight in general, with the addition of holiness thereto, (which is the work of God’s Spirit determining the act or faculty, to which it adheres *towards* God,) may be conceived thus, that it is

the acquiescence or rest of the soul in God, by a satisfiedness of will in him, as the best and most excellent good.

That it should be the rest of the soul, belongs to its general nature : and so does the kind of rest, mentioned by *the will's satisfiedness in him*. The soul may be said to rest satisfied by the mere knowledge of truth ; but *this* supposes so much of that also as is necessary. And because the acts of the understanding are subservient to those of the will in the soul's pursuit of a delightful good,—which is so far attained as the soul actually delights therein,—therefore this may more simply be called the rest of the whole soul ; especially, when we add, as in the *best and most excellent good* ; for this signifies the good, wherein it rests, to be ultimate, and its last end, the very period of its pursuits, beyond which it neither needs nor desires to go, as to the kind and nature of the good which it is now intent upon ;—though it still desire more of the same, until there be no place left for further desire, but it wholly cease and end in full satisfaction.

That we may speak somewhat more particularly of this rest in God ; It supposes knowledge of him,—that the soul be well furnished with such conceptions of his nature and attributes, that it may be truly said to be God it delights in,—not an idol of its own fancy, which its imagination has created and set up instead of God. Therefore his own representation of himself must be our measure ; which being forsaken, or not so diligently attended to, he is either misrepresented

by some, (according as their own corrupt hearts suggest impure thoughts,) and made altogether such a one as themselves, and such as cannot be the object of a pure and spiritual delight, or by others (as their guilt and fear suggest to them black and direful thoughts of him), made such that he cannot be the object of any delight at all.

It supposes actual thoughts of him; "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."^a

It supposes also a pleasedness with even the first view or apprehension of him; which is most essential to any love of him, and which gives rise to any motion of desire directed towards him, upon the apprehension that somewhat is absent, either of what is due to him, or lacking to ourselves from him.

It includes the satisfaction or repose itself which the soul has, so far as it finds its desire answered in the one kind or the other. Here, we must more distinctly know, that the delight taken in him is according as the desire is towards him, and that desire is as our love to him is.

Now we love him, either for himself, or for our ownselves: for himself, ultimately,—so as that our love terminates in him, and stays there, namely, on him as good in himself: for ourselves,—as when our love to him returns upon ourselves, apprehending a goodness in him suitable for our enjoyment.

Loving him in the former way, we desire that

^a Ps. lxxiii. 5, 6.

all may be ascribed and given to him, which possibly may or can. And because we know him to be every way perfect and full, and that nothing can be added to him of real perfection, and therefore nothing can be given him besides external honour and acknowledgments, we therefore desire these may be universally rendered him to the very uttermost. And as far as we find him worthily glorified, admired, and had in honour, so far we have delight, in or in reference to him, consisting in the gratification of that desire.

Loving him in the other way, (which also we are not only allowed but obliged to do, in contra-distinction to all creature good,) we desire his nearer presence and converse, more full communications of his light, grace, and consolations; and are delighted, according as we find such desire is answered to us.

The form of expression, used in the text, implies also a stirring up ourselves, and the use of endeavours with our own hearts, to foment, heighten, and raise our own delight.

CHAPTER VIII.

Right Manner of delighting in God. Excellence of the good delighted in. Delight in God, a Privilege and Duty. Sincerity of Delight in God.

WE now proceed to the modification of this delight in God, or the right manner or measure of it.

Concerning which it is apparent in general, it

can be no farther right than as it is agreeable to its object. That our delight should ever be adequate, or of a measure equal to the object, is plainly impossible: but it must be some way suitable, or must bear proportion to it. I shall here mention but two, and those very eminent, respects wherein it must do so; namely, in respect of the excellency and the permanency of the good to be delighted in.

1. The excellency of the object. Inasmuch as it is the best and highest good, it plainly challenges our highest delight: that is, the highest delight simply, which our natures are capable of, is most apparently due to the blessed God, even by the law of nature itself, resulting from our natures, and referred to his; and, as the case stands under the gospel, the highest delight comparatively, i. e. higher than we take in any thing else; nothing must be so much delighted in as God. We do not otherwise delight in him as God, —which is one way of glorifying him. It is part of the apostle's charge upon the pagan world, that, knowing him to be God, they did not glorify him as God.

If we make the comparison between him and all the good things of this world, the matter is out of question. It is the sense of holy souls, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And whom can I desire on earth besides thee?”^a When others say, “Who will shew us any good?” they say, “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.”^b Thereby he puts gladness into their

^a Ps. lxxiii. 25.

^b Ps. iv. 6.

hearts, more than when corn and wine increase. And whosoever love not Christ, more than father, mother, wife, child, yea and their own lives, cannot be his disciples.* Their present worldly life, if put in the balance, He must out-weigh.

If we make the comparison between our spiritual eternal life and him,—though he and that can never be in opposition (as there may be often an opposition between him and this present life, so that the one is often quitted for the other), yet neither is there a co-ordination, but the less worthy must be subordinate to the more worthy, —we are to desire the enjoyment of him for his own glory.

And yet, here, is a strange and admirable complication of these with one another. For if we enjoy him, and delight and rest in him, as our best and most satisfying good, we thereby glorify him as God; we give him, practically, the highest acknowledgments, we confess him the most excellent one. It is his glory to be the last term of all desires, and beyond which no reasonable desire can go. And if we seek and desire his glory supremely,—when he is glorified to the uttermost, or we are assured he will be, our highest desire is so far satisfied, and that is our contentment: so that, the more simply we go out of ourselves, so much the more certainly we find our own satisfaction, rest, and full blessedness in him. As it is impossible, that the soul, which loves him above itself, can be fully

* Matt. x. 47. Luke xiv. 26.

happy, while He hath not his full glory ; so it is, for the same reason, equally impossible, but that it must be so, when he has.

2. Our delight must be suitable to the object, or the good to be delighted in. In respect of the permanency of it, this is the most durable and lasting good. In this blessed object we are to rejoice evermore.* As, in the matter of trust, we are required to trust in the Lord for ever, because in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength^b,—everlasting strength gives sufficient ground for everlasting trust,—so it is in the matter of delight; a permanent everlasting excellency is not answered but by a continual and everlasting delight. Therefore, is it most justly said, “ Rejoice in the Lord alway ; and again I say, rejoice.”^c The object will warrant and justify the act, let it be drawn forth to never so vast a length of time. You will still find a continual spring, unexhausted fulness, a fountain never to be drawn dry.

We are next to shew, how we are called to it. The matter itself will answer the enquiry. We are called to it, according to what in itself it is. Now it is both a privilege and a duty. We are therefore called to it, 1. By way of gracious invitation to partake of a privilege, which our blessed Lord would have us share and be happy in,—no longer to spend ourselves in anxious pursuits and vain expectations of rest, where it is not to be found,—but that we retire ourselves to

* 1 Thess v. 16.

^b Isa. xxvi. 4.

^c Phil. iv. 4.

him, in whom we shall be sure to find it. Pity and mercy invite to place our delight here, and take up our rest. And concerning this, there is no question or imaginable doubt.

2. By way of authoritative command. For we must know, that delight in God is to be considered not only under the notion of a privilege, to which we may esteem ourselves entitled, but also of a duty, whereto we are most indispensably obliged. This is a thing not so much not understood, as not considered and seriously thought on by many; and the not considering it proves no small disadvantage to the life of religion. It occurs to many, more familiarly, under the notion of a high favour and a great vouchsafement, that God will allow any of the sons of men to place their delights in himself; but they seem to think, it is only the privilege of some special favourites; of whom, because they perhaps are conscious they have no cause to reckon themselves, they are therefore secure in the neglect of it. Thus is the pretence of modesty and humility very often made an umbrage and shelter to the vile carnality of many a heart; and a want of fitness is pretended and cherished at the same time, as an excuse that, whereas they do not delight in God, they never may: for he that is unfit to-day, and never therewithal applies himself with seriousness to the endeavour of becoming fit, is likely to be more unfit to-morrow. But what—is it indeed no duty to love God? Is that become no duty, which is the very sum and comprehension of all duties? Or can they be said

to love him, that take no pleasure in him,—that is, to love him without loving him. It is, indeed, wonderful grace, that there should be such a contexture of our happiness and duty; that, by the same thing wherein we are obedient, we also become immediately in the same degree blessed; and that the law of God in this case hath this very import of an obligation upon us to blessedness. But in the mean time we should not forget that God's authority and honour are concerned herein, as it is our duty; as well as our own happiness, as it is our privilege; and that we cannot injure ourselves in this matter, without also robbing God.

Delight in God is a great piece of homage to him, a practical acknowledgment of his sovereign excellency and perfect all-comprehending goodness. When we retire from all the world to him, we confess that he is better than all things besides, and that we have none in heaven or earth, that we esteem worthy to be compared with him. But when our hearts are averse to him, and will not be brought to delight in him, while there is somewhat wherein we do delight, we as much as say, "whatever that is, it is better than he."

Since we find the words are here laid down plainly in a preceptive form, "Delight thyself in the Lord," can any think themselves after this, at liberty to do so, or not? How forlorn is their case, who have nothing whereby to excuse their sin, but sin; and who, instead of extenuating their guilt, double it!

We are further to consider, that it is not only

commanded by a mere simple precept, but that this precept has its solemn sanction; and that, not only by promise, here expressly annexed, but also by implied threatening, that we shall not else have the desires of our hearts, but be necessarily unsatisfied and miserable. Great penalty is due upon not delighting in God, even by the gospel constitution itself,—which is not so unreasonably formed as to require more in this matter, than is suitable to the object itself, and is framed so indulgently, as to accept much less than is proportionable thereto, and yet within the capacity also of a reasonable soul. The very law of nature, resulting from the reference and comparison of our nature to God's own, requires, that we love him with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our might, and with all our strength; he deserves from us our very uttermost. Yet this is by the gospel constitution required with indulgence and abatement, not as to the matter required, but as to the manner of requiring it. The matter required is still the same, so that the purest and highest delight in God does not cease to be a duty, or any gradual defect thereof cease to be a sin. The gospel makes no change in the nature of things; makes nothing cease to be due to God from us, which the law of nature made due; nor renders any defect innocent, which is in its own nature culpable and faulty. Therefore the same pitch of delight in God is still due and required, that ever was: but that perfection is not (finally and without relief) required in the same manner, and on

the same terms as it was; that is, it is not, by the gospel, required under remediless penalty, as it was: for the law of nature, though it made not a remedy simply impossible, yet it provided none; but the gospel provides one.

Yet not so but the same penalty also remains in itself due and deserved, which was before. For as the gospel takes not away the dueness of any part or degree of that obedience, which we owed to God naturally, so it takes not away the natural dueness of punishment for disobedience, in any kind or degree: only it provides that it becomes to us a remissible debt, and actually remitted to them who come up to the terms of it. Not that it should be in itself no debt,—for then nothing were remitted; nor yet, when it so provides for the remission of defects in this part of our duty, does it remit the substance of the duty itself, or pardon any defects of it, to any but such who are found sincere in this as well as the other parts of that obedience which we owe. Others, who, after so gracious overtures, remain at their former distance, and retain their aversion, enmity, and disaffection to God, it most grievously and most justly threatens and punishes as implacable,—those, who will upon no terms return into a state of friendship and amity with their Maker, who have hated him without cause, and now continue strangers and enemies to him without excuse,—so that the very blood of the reconciling sacrifice cries against them.^a

^a Heb. x. 29.

Surely, since it is God in Christ that is the entire object of this delight or love, it is a fearful penalty that is determined upon them that do not so place it, when it is said, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha;"^a and when also it is said, "Grace be upon all them that love the Lord,"^b it is plainly implied, that the penalty belongs to all them who do not love him in sincerity.

Of the sincerity of delight in God it is necessary we be well informed. 1. That we delight in him supremely, viz. with our highest and deepest complacency of will. For it is not necessary, nor ordinarily possible, that our delight in him should be ever accompanied with such sensible agitation of the corporeal spirits, as we find in reference to merely sensible objects. But it is necessary, there be that practical estimation of him, and propensity towards him, as the best and most excellent good, that we be in a preparation of mind and heart to forego for his sake whatever can come into any competition with him. 2. That we continue herein,—that this be the constant habitual temper of our spirits towards him,—that we cleave to him with purpose of heart, as not only the most excellent but the most permanent object of our delight, having settled the resolution with ourselves, "This God shall be our God for ever and ever; He shall be our God and guide even to death."^c We give this account of sincerity of delight in God, not

^a 1 Cor. xvi. 22. ^b Eph. vi. 24. ^c Psalm xlviii. 14.

to encourage any to take up with the lowest degree of that sincerity, but that none may be encouraged, upon their own mistake in this matter, to take up with any thing short of it; and that we may see whence to take our rise, in aiming at the highest pitch thereof.

In reference to our gradual defects and intermissions herein, we ought to be deeply humbled, as being faulty. We need continual pardon upon these accounts; we owe it to the blood of the Redeemer, that such things can be pardoned. We are not to reckon or ever to expect, that blood should stand us in stead, to obtain our pardon for never delighting in God sincerely at all; but only—supposing we do it sincerely—that we do it not perfectly. For most certainly, they whose hearts are never turned to him as their best and most sovereign good or portion, and ruler or Lord, but who still remain alienated in their minds, and enemies through wicked works, will notwithstanding perish.

Thus, we have in some measure shewn the import of the direction in the text, that we *delight ourselves in the Lord*.

OF
DELIGHTING IN GOD.

Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of
thine heart.—Psalm xxxvii. 4.

PART II.

CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF DELIGHTING
IN GOD.

CHAPTER I.

*Of Religion as matter of delight. Of a Religion without
practice. Of a Religion merely of Opinions. Of a Religion
of mere form. Of a well principled vital Religion. Remon-
strance to false Professors.*

WE have, in the former Part, extended the meaning of the words, *delight thyself in the Lord*, beyond what they seem at first sight literally to signify: so as not to understand them merely as requiring that very single act of delight to be immediately and directly terminated on God himself, but to take them as comprehending also the sum of all holy and religious converse with God, i. e. as it is delightful or seasoned with delight, and, upon the same account, the sum of all our other converse, so far as it is influenced by religion. And I doubt not, by such as shall attentively have considered what has been said, it will be thought very reasonable to take them in that latitude; whereof the very

letter of the text is most fitly capable. For the particle which we read, *in* the Lord, has not that signification alone, but signifies also *with*, or *by*, or *before*, or *in presence of*,—as if it had been said, Come and sit down with God, retire thyself to him, and solace thyself in the delights which are to be found in his presence and converse, in walking with him, and transacting thy course as before him and in his sight:—as a man may be said to delight himself with a friend, who puts himself under his roof, and, besides personal converse with himself, freely enjoys the pleasure of all the entertainments, accommodations, and provisions which he is freely willing to communicate, and has the satisfaction, which a sober person would take, in observing the rules and order of a well governed house.

According to this diverse import of the precept enjoining this duty, it will be requisite to speak diversely of the practice of the duty itself: that is, to treat of the practice and exercise of delight; 1. As a thing adherent to the other duties of religion; 2. As it is a distinct duty of itself.

1. As to the former, our business will be, to treat of the exercise of religion as delightful. Now religion is delightful naturally and in itself, and makes a man's other actions, even such as are not in themselves acts of religion, delightful also, so far as they are governed and influenced by it,—if that religion be true, i. e. if it be living, or such as proceeds from a principle of divine life.

Being therefore now to treat of the practice of *this duty*, our discourse must aim at and en-

deavour these two things,—the former as leading and subservient to the latter,—viz. that we may not take up and rest in, or let our practice terminate in a religion, which is not naturally and in itself delightful; and that we seek after and improve in that which is so.

We have great reason not to acquiesce in or be content with that which is not so; for it is plainly such as will not bear its own charges, as having only burden in it, and no use or end—I mean the dead formality of religion only. We find it natural and pleasant to carry about with us our own living body; but who could endure,—how wearisome and loathsome a task were it,—to lug to and fro a dead carcase. It will be, upon this account, needful to insist upon shewing more distinctly, what sort of religion it is that is in itself wholly undelightful, and to propound some things for consideration concerning it, that may tend to beget a dislike of it, and so incline us to look farther.

Because our present subject confines us to this one measure of religion, *that it be delightful*, it will be proper to limit our discourse to this character only of the religion, which we are to pass from as vain and worthless, viz. *that which is without delight*,—which it will be sufficient to insist on, for our present purpose. Since the delightfulness of the religion, which is true and living, is intrinsical and most natural to it, it will therefore be certainly consequent, that the religion, which is not delightful, is dead and can *serve for nothing*.

And yet here it will be necessary, for caution, to insert, 1. That even such religion as is true and living, and consequently in itself delightful, yet may by accident sometimes not appear or be thought so; because either variety of occasions may divert from minding, or some imbittering distemper of spirit may hinder the present relishing of that pleasure which is truly in it: as a man may eat and feed on that which is savoury and good, and yet, though his taste be not vitiated, but because he reflects not, may not every moment have that present apprehension, that it is so,—much more if the organs of taste be under a present distemper; but, if they be not so, any one's asking him how he likes a thing, (which occasions a more express animadversion,) will draw from him an acknowledgment, that it is pleasant. 2. That a dead religion may be thought delightful, and, through the ill temper of the subject, a pleasure may be apprehended in it, which does not naturally arise from it; that is, the mere external part of religion may be perverted into a subserviency to some purposes, which religion of itself intends not, in respect whereof a delight may injuriously be taken in it;—as is said, by the prophet, of a hypocritical people, “Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness; they take delight in approaching to God.”^a

Therefore, that which is here intended is, not

^a Isa. lviii. 2.

that this religion should be rejected, because in some present exercises thereof we have not the actual relish of a present pleasure, but that which can rightfully afford us none, and which, upon our utmost enquiry, cannot in reason be thought spiritually delectable.

We shall therefore, in some particular heads, give a short account of such religion, as rationally cannot but be judged undelightful, or which has not that in it which can yield pleasure to a sound and well complexioned spirit; wherein if any pleasure be taken, that very pleasure is so unnatural, as to be the argument rather of a disease in the subject, than of any real goodness in the thing itself.

We should justly reckon that an undue delight,—which a man takes in food, if he only please himself with looking on the handsome garnishing of the dishes, which he loathes and refuses to taste,—or which a covetous miser takes in having wealth hoarded up, which he is pleased often to view and cannot endure to use. And that were most irrationally delight, which in a fever one should take in gratifying his distempered appetite, whereby he does not so much relieve nature as feed his disease.

So we may say, that religion is undelightful, i. e. not duly delightful, which consists wholly in revolving in one's own mind the notions that belong to religion, without either the experience or the design and expectation of having the heart and conversation formed according to *them*. So the case is with persons who content

themselves to admit the principles of religion to be true, and behold with a notional assent and approbation the connexion and agreement of one thing with another, yet never consider the tendency and aim of the whole, or that the truth of the gospel is the doctrine that is according to godliness,^a and such as is pursuant to the design of making men godly, of transforming them into the image of God, and framing them to an entire subjection to his holy and acceptable will,—persons, who bethink not themselves that the truth is never learned as it is in Jesus, except it be to the renewing the spirit of the mind, the putting off the old man, and the putting on of the new.^b When this is never considered, but men only know that they may know, and are never concerned further about the great things of God, than only to take notice that such things there are offered to their view, which carry with them the appearance of truth, but mind them no more than the affairs of Utopia or the world in the moon,—what delight is taken in this knowledge is surely most perverse. There is a pleasure indeed in knowing things, and in apprehending the coherence of one truth with another; but if a man shall allow himself to speculate only about things wherein his life is concerned, and shall entertain himself with delight in agitating in his mind certain curious general notions, concerning a disease or a crime that threatens him with present death, or what might be a remedy or

^a 1 Tim. vi. 3.^b Eph. iv. 24.

defence in such a case, without any thought of applying such things to his own case, or that the case is his own,—one may say of such pleasure, it is mad. He that only surfeits his eye with beholding the food he is to live by, and who in the mean time languishes in the want of appetite, and in a sickly loathing of his proper nutriment,—surely such a one has a pleasure which no sober man would think worth having.

It is yet a more insipid religion, which too many place in some peculiar opinions, that are either false and contrary to religion, or doubtful and cumbersome to it, or little and inconsiderable, and therefore certainly alien to it and impertinent. It must here be acknowledged, that some doctrines, not only not revealed in the word of God, but which are contrary thereto, may, if thought true, occasion the excitation of some inward affection, and have an indirect influence to the regulating of practise also, so as to repress some grosser enormities :—as the false notions of pagans concerning the Deity, which have led them to idolatry, and struck their minds with a certain kind of reverence of invisible powers, and perhaps rendered some more sober and less vicious than they would have been, if destitute of all religious sentiments ; and yet the good which hath ensued, is not to be referred to the particular principles of idolatry, which were false, but to the more general principles of religion, which were true.^a

^a Though such false principles, viewed alone and by themselves, may possibly infer somewhat of good, yet that is by accident only, and through the short-sightedness and ignorance

Of the like strain is the religion that is made up all of talk. Such are that sort of persons, who love to discourse of those great things of God, wherewith it was never their design or aim to have their hearts stamped, or their lives commanded and governed,—who invert that which was the ancient glory of the christian church, “we do not speak great things, but live them,” and are pleased with only the noise of their own insignificant words,—to whom how ungrateful a relish would that precept have, “Be swift to hear, slow to speak!” It is a lovely thing to behold those that are intent upon the great business of religion themselves, provoking others also with a serious gravity unto love and good works: and it will ever stand as a monumental character of them that feared the Lord, that upon this account they spake often one to another.^a But the pretence of this is odious, when the thing designed is nothing but self recommendation, and the spirit of the pretenders is visibly vain and empty;

of them with whom they obtain; who, if they considered their incoherence with other common notions and principles most certainly true, would receive from them—if thought the only principles of religion—so much the greater hurt, and become so much the more hopelessly and incurably wicked: as, most manifestly, the principles which lead to idolatry, being really false, led to atheism, and of themselves tend to subvert and destroy all religion. Therefore such doctrines as cohere not with the general frame of truth,—whatever their particular aspect may be, considered apart and by themselves,—are yet in their natural tendency opposite and destructive to the true design of religion.

^a Mal. iii. 16.

and when it is apparent, they take delight, not in the things they speak of, but only in speaking much. No breath is then more fulsome; and the better the things are, the worse it is to have no more savour of them.

Again, the religion is akin to this, which stands all in hearing. It is as remote, at least from the heart, when it is wholly placed in the ear, as when it is all in the tongue. Thus it is with them that are hearers only, not doers of the word,—“deceiving their own souls;”^a when the preacher is to them as a very lovely song of one that can play well on an instrument, and they hear his words, but do them not.^b It is natural to the same sort of persons to be pleased indifferently with either of these, as the Athenians were in hearing or telling some new thing: only that this difference most commonly appears,—whereas the things, they delight to hear, must be ever new or at least new dressed, the things they speak shall be everlastingly the same. How perverse a delight is that! whereas it is the glory of substantial religion, that the principal things of it can never grow old or be dry, their ears still itch after novelties;—a plain argument, that it is not religion itself that pleases them (which cannot change,) but the variable accessory modes of representing it.

Lastly, it is a most undelightful religion which consists entirely in the external forms of worship, which this or that party have chosen to affix to

^a James i. 22.

^b Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

it,—yea, though those forms be of divine prescription: for, however God hath appointed them, they were never appointed or intended by him to be our religion, but to be subservient helps and means to it. Being enlivened by it, they are comely and delightful; but severed and cut off from it,—or the course of vital spirit, that should flow into them, being obstructed and repressed,—they have no more pleasure in them than a dead arm or finger. Such divine appointments themselves, severed from the things wherein substantial religion consists, have been an abomination to the Lord,^a “your new moons and sabbaths, my soul hates:” surely then, there is little reason they should be a delight to us. If they be, it is as fond and trifling a delight, as, when one hath the opportunity of conversing with some excellent person, to neglect all his wise sayings and pleasant instructive discourses, and only to please one’s self in viewing his handsome apparel. Thus it is with them that mind only the solemnity of God’s worship, not the design.

It remains, therefore, to shew, how unfit such a religion is to be chosen or rested in. And, surely, since the persuading of men to become religious or godly is but an inviting them to a state and course wherein they may delight themselves with God, or to a life of pure and heavenly pleasure, that is only the vain shew of religion which affords nothing of that pleasure. And how unreasonable and foolish is it, when religion itself

^a Isa. i. 13.

is the thing we pretend, to let ourselves be mocked—as we mock others, and vainly attempt to mock him also who is not to be mocked—with the mere empty shew and appearance of it!

That we may be here somewhat more particular, let it be considered, that the religion which is in itself undelightful is, for the same reason for which it is so, incapable of growth, because it is a dead thing. For that reason it is without delight, and, for the same reason, admits not of improvement: it wants the self-improving principle. “He that drinks of that water (saith our Saviour) which I shall give him, it shall be in him as a well of water springing up in him unto life eternal.”^a That only principle of all true religion and godliness, the divine nature, the seed of God, is of heavenly tendency; it aims and aspires upward, and will never cease shooting up until it reach heaven; and the pleasure and delightfulness of it stand much in its continual springing up towards a perfect state,—from a grain of mustard seed to the tallness of a cedar. It is pleasant to behold its constant undecaying greenness and verdure; such as renders its subject “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth fruit in season, whose leaf also doth not wither, and whatsoever he doth prospers”^b, or “as plants set in the house of the Lord, that flourish in the courts of their God, that shall still bring forth fruit even in old age, and be fat and flourishing.”^c The dead dry forms

^a John iv. 14.

^b Ps. i. 3.

^c Ps. xciii. 13.

or other appendages of religion that have no communion with a living root, or the religion that is only made up of these, give no such hope of improvement. The value even of true religion, though it be of an excellent nature and kind, consists much in the hopefulness and improveableness of it; and is not so much to be considered in respect of what it is, as what it shall come to. This spiritless religion, as soon as you assume and take it up, you know the best of it. It is true, the notional knowledge, opinionativeness, and external observances, which we have spoken of, may be so increased as an heap of sand may be; but the religion of such grows not as a thing that hath life in it, by vital self-improvement.

Nor, for the same reason, can it be a lasting thing. For it wants what should maintain it. It will, as a vesture, wear and grow old; or being as a cloak put on to serve a present turn, is, when that turn is served, as easily thrown off, being found to be more cumbersome than useful. What hath living union with a man's own self, he cannot endure to lay aside.

It is given as a character of an hypocrite, (one who must be understood to carry with him some shew and face of religion, but to want the living root and principle of it,) that he is inconstant in his religion. "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he at all times call upon God?"^a will he be constantly religious? It is absurd to say or think that he will. The matter is plain,

^a Job. xxvii. 10.

his religion is measured by his secular interest, and he will only be so long religious as will serve that purpose. And the reason is plainly assigned in the foregoing words, “ Will he delight himself in the Almighty?” His religion hath no delight with it ; it is a languid, faint, spiritless thing, a dead form. If it had life, it would have pleasure in it ; and then the same vital principle that would make it pleasant, would make it lasting and permanent also.

While it does last, it wants the fruit and profit, which should be designed and sought by religion ; even for the same reason for which it is without delight, it is also fruitless and vain, i. e. because it hath no life in it : so that all that is done in this way of religion, is only labour and toil to no purpose. What can we propose to ourselves from religion, as the proper design of it, but to have our spirits fitted for the honouring and enjoying of God, for service to him, and blessedness in him ; and that we may, hereupon, actually both serve and enjoy him ? Both these chiefly depend upon his favourable acceptance of us. He will neither reckon himself served by us, nor allow himself to be enjoyed, if he be not pleased with us. And how shall we expect to please him with that wherewith, the more our minds come to be rectified and made conformable to the rule of righteousness and life, the more impossible it is that we can be pleased ourselves ? Can we please him by a religion that is in itself spiritless and dead, and that affords not to ourselves the least *relish of true pleasure* ? Is it a likely means of

refining and bettering our spirits? As it is void of spiritual delight, it is void also of spiritual benefit; for certainly our spirits are likely to embrace and retain nothing, in which they can take no pleasure. How vain then is that religion, by which we can neither please God, nor profit ourselves.

It ought to be considered how foolish a thing it is, and unworthy of a reasonable creature, to do that in a continued course and series of actions, wherein we can have no design, and aim at nothing. Even they that place their religion in things so remote and alien to the spirit and power of it, do yet spend a considerable part of their life-time in those things. And how unbecoming is it of a man to have spent so much of his time in doing nothing, and that from week to week or from day to day the seasons should return, of which he has constantly this to say, "Now comes the time of doing that, whereof I can give no account why I do it!" Is this a wise provision for eternity? What, man, a few empty unimproved notions! a by opinion or two! the flourishes of a little pedantic art, tickling thy toyish fancy! the motion of thy busy tongue! the thirst and satisfaction of thy vain ear! the bowing of thy hypocritical knee! Are these all that thou designest for thy soul? Are these likely to supply the place of living religion, to serve thee instead of inward acquaintance with God, instead of being really and habitually good and holy, instead of doing good and walking in the *path of life*? What a soul hast thou, that can

live upon chaff and air, and be sustained by the wind! Hast thou no need of quickening influence from God, no hunger after the heavenly hidden manna and the fruits of the tree of life? What use makest thou of thy understanding or of the reason of a man, when thou thinkest such empty vanities, as thou trustest in, can do the office, or attain the ends of true religion? How much more rational were it to pretend to nothing of religion at all, than to think such a one will serve the turn!

Consider, what reflections are like to be made upon this matter hereafter, when thy short course in this world is run out. Will it be a grateful remembrance to thee, that thou wast so long hovering about the borders of religion, and wast at the very door, and wouldest not enter in?—that thou didst so often think and speak, and hear, of the things wherein religion stood, but wouldest never allow thyself to taste the pleasant relishes thereof?—to have been so nigh to the kingdom of God, and yet an alien to it, alien to righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, wherein it consists? Will not these be wounding thoughts?

Let it be seriously pondered, how offensive it must be to the jealous God, that any should thus trifle with him and his holy things under a show and pretence of religion and devotion to him. Not to please him by the sincerity and truth of our religion, loses the end and reward we would expect. But that is not all. To provoke him by the hypocritical pretence and abuse of it, cannot

but bring on a sharp revenge, which, it may be, we expected not.

And, let us bethink ourselves, how high the provocation is. Either we design to please honour and enjoy him by that irrational and undelightful course of religion, or we do not. If we do not, this signifies nothing but highest contempt and defiance of him, and that we care not for his favour, nor fear his displeasure: yea, inasmuch as such religion is pretended as an homage to him, it is nothing really but most profane and insolent mockery; as if we would join in the same breath and in the same act, "Hail Jesus" and "Crucify him,"—at once invest him with the purple robe, and spit in his face. But if we have such a design, and do really think to please him by such trifling with him, and that these vain fancies and formalities shall make amends for all our neglects of him through the whole course of our lives besides, then how vile thoughts have we of him! what do we make of the God we serve? How justly may that be applied to us, Ye worship ye know not what!^a Who gave us our idea of that ever blessed Being? It is not God, but a despicable idol of our own creating, we are thinking to please. We may see how well he is pleased with the external show and the appendages of religion,—which, being his own appointments, would in conjunction and in subserviency thereto have signified somewhat, but disjoined from it, and accompanied with the

^a John iv. 22.

neglect and abandoning of real piety and righteousness, signify nothing but an affront to him—in that remonstrance by the prophet, “He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.”^a He is pleased with their religion as he would be with murder, profaneness and idolatry. And is it strange this should be his estimate, when he is hereby practically represented as such a one that will not be displeased with real wickedness, and that will be pleased with the thinnest and most superficial show of devotion? These therefore make a false pretence of their religion, and are so far from pleasing God by it and advantaging themselves, that they wound their own souls, (as they are most like to do, that handle so awkwardly such an edged tool,) and render God their most avowed enemy.

The religion, then, which has no delight in it, has so much of folly incommmodity and mischief, that, measuring it by the rules which were premised, we may see sufficient reason, why such a religion should not be chosen or rested in, and that we are concerned to look further.

^a Isaiah lxvi. 3.

CHAPTER II.

Directions for improving in Religion. Of the Study of its practical truths. Of the cultivation of habitual holiness. Of attention to the state of Mind. Of the motives and principles of a religious life. Of dependence on God, and obedience. Solemn appeal to the reader's conscience.

WE proceed next, to the other head we proposed : What religion is fit to be chosen, and wherein we may safely acquiesce ;—whereof we shall only give the account, which the subject, we have in hand, allows to be here given, i. e. that it be such as is in itself rationally and justly delectable. And though religion is not to be chosen only, or chiefly, for the delightfulness of it ; yet since, as we have seen, only that religion is true which is delightful, that only which is delightful is fit to be chosen. So that this is a certain character, though not the chief cause, of the eligibility of religion. And, when it is so expressly enjoined us as a duty, “to delight ourselves in the Lord,” if (as has been shewn,) this be within the meaning of the precept, that we delight ourselves in the way and course of religion, it is plain such religion only can be meant or intended, as can afford us matter of delight, or as is in itself truly and really delectable.

Here we shall not need to repeat what has been so largely discoursed of in the former part, tending to shew the rich matter of delight, which the several exercises of true living religion, *and all the actions* influenced and directed by it,

do carry in them. It will be only requisite to offer somewhat, partly to direct, partly to excite, to that delightful pleasant life.

For direction—Let such rules be observed as these which follow.

1. Endeavour to have a mind well instructed in the knowledge of such things, as more directly concern the common practice of a religious man, as such : that is, to be thoroughly insighted into practical truths, or into that truth which is after godliness.

It has been the merciful vouchsafement of the divine goodness so to order, that those things are plain and but few, which are of more absolute necessity in religion ;—as may be seen by the summary account which we find sometimes given thereof, *Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ* ;^a which two things, intimated to comprehend the whole counsel of God, manifestly suppose the state of apostacy, and express the way of remedy ; whereinto when we are brought, how succinct and clear a recapitulation of our duty have we in that of our Saviour, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind : and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself !” To a well-complexioned spirit, how comprehensive, how full, how acceptable will these things appear ! Such a one would not part with the substantial fulness of these few words for all the treasures of both

^a Acts xx. 21.

Indies. How truly is it called, That good, that acceptable, and perfect will of God!^a And how fitly to be preferred before thousands of gold and silver!

Things of highest value are not bulky; their excellency is the greater by being contracted, and that being in themselves precious they are so conveniently portable. How easily are these dictates carried about with us through our whole course; and how universally useful are they for the well guiding of it, to such as have a greater mind to do their duty than move questions about it.

Two things are opposite to this rule, and not a little prejudicial to the delight of religious conversation; viz. excessive curiosity in the speculations of truths belonging to religion without designing to refer them to practice, and an excessive scrupulosity about matters of practice. It were indeed an argument of a desperate mind and destitute of any fear of God, to be careless what we do, and unconcerned whether the way we take, in this or that case, be right or wrong. But it is certain there may be an excess in this matter, and too often is; that is, there may be a scrupulosity, which is both causeless and endless. There is surely some medium in travelling, between a careless wandering we mind not whither, and a perpetual anxiety whether we be in our way or no, with often going back to enquire. This would quite destroy both the pleasure of the

^a Rom. xii. 2.

journey and the progress of it. Some difficulties may occur, which should justly occasion one to make a stand and consider: but probably, very many cases, that some agitate with much disquiet to themselves and others, would soonest be expedited by sincerity and by reducing them to the law of love.

It would however make much for our pleasant delightful walking on in the way of God, to have a mind informed and established thoroughly in the belief of the principal doctrines of christian religion, well furnished also with those most useful practical precepts, which might at every turn be ready at hand to be applied upon emergencies, and by which they to whom predominant self-interest or corrupt inclination renders it not difficult to apprehend their duty, (our way is not usually otherwise so very intricate,) may cheerfully and innocently guide themselves. "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely:" though some men's way may by the circumstances of their conditions be much more perplexed than others,—who are therefore concerned to be the more wary. But the difficult toil that some have with themselves is, how by contrived explications they may make their rule bend and yield to their self-biassed humours and ends; and, because they find it not easy to do this with full satisfaction to their consciences,—that see more than they would have them, and are yet not of authority enough to govern and command their practice,—it is not strange they entangle and even lose themselves amongst thorns and

briars, and meet with little delight in their way.

2. Be principally intent to have your soul become habitually good and holy, by its own settled temper and complexion inclined and made suitable to the way of righteousness and life. It was, no doubt, with a very sweet taste of pleasure, that the Psalmist utters that gratulatory acknowledgment of the divine goodness, "He restoreth my soul, he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."^a The paths of righteousness are very agreeable and pleasant to a restored sound and healthy soul, to one that is now got into a good habit and a settled state of spiritual strength. You may therefore take the meaning and substance of this precept, in the Apostle's more authoritative words, "Be ye transformed in the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, that acceptable, and perfect will of God."^b You can never have a proof of it, till that transformation and renewing change have past upon you. Then, it will be pleasant to you to know the will of God; your delight will be in the law of the Lord, and in his law you will meditate both day and night. It will be most pleasant to do it. You will esteem the words of his mouth as your appointed food, and it will be as your meat and drink to do his will. You can easily apprehend, how toilsome and painful any thing of business and labour is to a person that languishes under some

^a *Ps.* xxiii. 2.

^b *Rom.* xii. 2.

enfeebling lazy disease: a like case it is, when you would put one upon doing any thing spiritually good, who is listless, indisposed, and to every good work reprobate. How will the heart recoil and give back! with how vehement reluctance will it resist the proposal, as if you were urging it upon flames or the sword's point! The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to his law, nor indeed can be.^a But when once the law of God is within your heart, you will delight to do his will.^b To one that is born of God and hath overcome the world, his commands are not grievous.^c Know therefore, you must be good, really and habitually so, in order to your doing good with any delight,^d in conformity to the blessed God himself, your pattern, who exercises loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth, as delighting in these things.^e You must be partaker of a divine nature, and have the heart-rectifying communication before discoursed of, and become God's own workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.^f It is not to be hoped, that it can be delightful to act against inclination, or that a forced imitation of that good, whereof you want the implanted vital principle, can be any more pleasing to you than it is to God, whom you cannot mock or impose upon by your most elaborate or specious disguises. And therefore, since that holy heart-rectitude must be had, it must be sought earnestly and without rest. Often

^a Rom. viii. 7.^b Ps. lx. 8.^c 1 John v. 3.^d Ps. cxix. 68.^e Jer. ix. 23.^f Eph. ii. 10.

ought heaven to be visited with such sighs and longings sent up thither, "O that my ways were directed, to keep thy righteous judgments:" "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed."^a And it should be sought with expectation of good speed and without despair, remembering we are told, if we ask we shall receive; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened unto us; and that our heavenly Father will much more readily give his Holy Spirit to them that ask, than you would give bread, to your child that calls for it, rather than a stone.

3. When once you find your spirit is become in any measure well inclined, and begins to favour that which is truly good, know yet, that it needs your continual inspection and care, to cherish good principles, and repress evil ones. Your work is not done, as soon as you begin to live; as care about an infant ceases not, as soon as it is born. Let it be therefore your constant business to tend your inward man; otherwise all things will soon be out of course. God hath coupled delight with the labour of a Christian, not with sloth and neglect of himself. The heart must then be kept with all diligence,^b or above all keeping, inasmuch as out of it are the issues of life. All vital principles are lodged there; and only the genuine issues, of such as are good and holy, will yield you pleasure. The exercises of religion will be pleasant, when they

^a *Ps. cxix. 80.*

^b *Prov. iv. 23.*

are natural and flow easily from their own fountain; but great care must be taken, that the fountain be kept pure. There are other springs besides, which will be apt to intermingle therewith their bitter waters or a root of bitterness, whose fruit is deadly,—even that evil thing, the bitter forsaking of the Lord. I wonder not, that they taste little of the delights of religion, who take no heed to their spirits. Such a curse is upon the nature of man, as is upon the ground which was cursed for his sake,—(till the blessing through Jesus Christ take place, even the promise of the Spirit,^a) that it brings forth naturally thorns and thistles, and mingles sorrows with his bread. But that promised blessing that will enable a man to eat with pleasure, comes not all at once; nor do the increases of it come on, or the pleasant fruits of righteousness spring up, but in them that give all diligence to add to their faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity:—which would make, that we are not barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.^b Otherwise, look in upon thy soul when thou wilt, and thou wilt have no other than the dismal prospect of miserable wastes and desolation. Consider it seriously, wretched man! who tillest thy field but not thy soul, and lovest to

^a Gal. iii. 14.

^b 2 Pet. i. 5.

see thy garden neat and flourishing, but lettest thy spirit lie as a neglected thing, and as if it were not thine.

We are directed, for the moderating of our care in our earthly concerns, to consider the lilies, how they grow without their own toil, and are beautifully arrayed without their spinning; but we are taught by no such instances, to divert or remit our care of our inward man. To these concerns let us then apply and bend ourselves; that is, carefully observe the first stirrings of our thoughts and desires; animadvert upon our inclinations as soon as they can come in view, upon our designs in their very formation; and enquire concerning each, whence is it,—from a good principle or a bad? whether tends it, to good or hurt? will not this design, if prosecuted, prove an unjustifiable self-indulgence? Does it not tend to an unlawful gratifying of the flesh, and fulfilling some lusts thereof? If so, let it be lopped out of hand, and the axe be laid even to the root; strike at it, favour it not; think with thyself, this, if spared, will breed me sorrow; so much as I give to it, I take away from the comfort of my life, and spend of the stock of my spiritual delight in God: shall I let sin, the tormentor of my soul, live and be maintained at so costly a rate?—If any good inclination discover itself, cherish it, confirm and strengthen it. Look up, and pray down a further quickening influence; say with thyself, now that the heavenly Spirit of Life and Grace begins to breath,—more of this *pleasant vital breath*, thou blessed and Holy

Spirit ! account this a seed time, where light and gladness are to be sown in thy soul,—which are wont to be for the righteous and upright in heart, and promise ere long a joyful harvest.

4. Be frequent and impartial in the actual exercise of gracious principles, or in practising and doing as they direct. Your actual delight arises from, and accompanies your holy actions themselves, and is to be perceived and tasted in them ; not in the mere inclination to them, which is not strong enough to go forth into act. As these principles are more frequently exercised, they grow more lively and vigorous, and will thence act more strongly and pleasantly ; so that your delight in doing good will grow with the principles it proceeds from.

But then you must be impartial and even-handed herein, as well as frequent ; and run the whole compass of that duty which belongs to you as a Christian. Exercise yourself (as we find the direction is) unto godliness,^a and in such acts and parts of godliness chiefly, as may be, the exercise of the mind and spirit, in opposition to the bodily exercise (whether severities imposed upon, or performances that require the ministry of that grosser part) to which this nobler kind of exercise is justly preferred. Turn the powers of your soul upon God. Act seasonably the several graces of the Spirit, that terminate directly upon him ; let none grow out of use ; at some times repentance, at others faith, now

^a 1 Tim. iv. 7.

your love, then your fear; none of these are placed in you or sanctified in vain. Retire much with God; learn and habituate yourselves to secret converse with him; contemplate his nature, attributes and works for your excitation to holy adoration, reverence and praise. Be much exercised in the open solemnities of his worship; there endeavouring, that though your inward man bear not the only part, it may bear the principal part. How delightful a thing is it, to be paying actual avowed homage to the great Lord of heaven and earth before angels and men!

Never think your religious and devotional exercises can acquit you, or supply the want and excuse the absence of sobriety and righteousness. Exercise a just authority over yourselves. Keep your imagination, passions and sensitive appetite under due restraint, so as to be moderate in your desires and enjoyments, patient as to your wants and sufferings: do to others as you would be done unto: study common good: endeavour, so far as your capacity can extend, that all about you may be the better for you; forbear and forgive the injurious, relieve the necessitous, delight in good men, pity the bad, be grateful towards friends, mild and unvengeful towards enemies, just towards all: abhor to do not only a dishonest but even a mean or unworthy act, for any self-advantage: and all this out of an awful and dutiful respect to God, by which the ordinary actions of your life may become as so many acts of religion, or be directed and influenced thereby, tintured *as it were with the savour of godliness.* Pass

thus in your continual practice, through the whole circle of christian duties and graces, with an equal respect to all God's commandments, not so partially addicting yourselves to one sort of exercise, as to disuse and neglect the rest ;— which kind of partiality is that which starves religion, and stifles the delight of it.

There are those that affect the reputation of being sober, just, kind, charitable persons, and do appear such, who yet are great strangers to God and to the more noble exercises of the divine life, know not what belongs to communion with God, live not in his love and converse, savournot heaven, and have not so much as the taste of the great vital powers of the world to come. Others who pretend to much acquaintance with God, and are much taken up in discoursing of his love and of intimacies with him, yet count justice and charity mean things and much beneath them, can allow themselves to be covetous, oppressive, fraudulent, wrathful, malicious, peevish, fretful, discontented, proud, censorious, merciless; and so glory in a religion, which no one is the better for, and themselves least of all, and which is quite of another stamp from the pure and undefiled religion, which the Apostle describes and recommends.* Certainly their religion has as little of pleasure in it to themselves, as it has of beauty and ornament in the sight of others. So maimed a religion can be accompanied with little delight. Would it not detract much from the

* James i. 27.

natural pleasure of a man's life, if he should lose an arm or a leg, or have them useless and un-serviceable? or if he should be deprived of some of his senses or natural faculties, so as to be incapable of some of the more principal functions of life? And if we should suppose the new creature alike maimed or defective, will there not be a proportionable diminution of its delight? But the Spirit of God is the author of no such imperfect productions; and therefore the total absence of any holy disposition will not argue the true delight of such a one to be little, but none at all. However, let all the integral parts of the new man be supposed formed at first, and existing together;—when this creature is thus entirely framed, it is our business to see to the due exercise, and thereby to the improvement and growth of the several parts, wherein if one be neglected, it infers a general enfeeblement of the whole. “Let patience have its perfect work” (saith the Apostle,) “that ye may be perfect,” &c.^a implying, that not only the absence of that one grace, but its not being thoroughly exercised would render us very defective Christians. We may say of the several members of this divine creature, as is said of the complex body of Christians, if one suffer, all the members suffer with it; if one be honoured, all rejoice with it. Therefore, that you may experience the delightfulness of religion, see that in the exercise and practice of it you be entire thorough Christians.

^a James i. 4.

5. Be confirmed in the apprehension that religion is in itself a delightful thing, even universally and in the whole nature of it:—whereby a double practical error will be avoided, that greatly hinders the actual relish and sensation of that delight: 1. That either religion is in the whole nature of it such a thing to which delight must be alien, and banished from it, —as if nothing could consist with it, but sour severities, pensiveness and sad thoughts: or else, 2. that if that delight could belong to it, it must be found in peculiar extraordinary assurances and persuasions of God's love, and be the attainment consequently of none but more eminent Christians. That apprehension being thoroughly admitted, both these misapprehensions fall and vanish. And this will take place, if it be duly considered that there is a delight that will naturally arise from the fitness of actions in themselves, and from the facility wherewith they flow from their proper principles:—whereupon there can be no true vital act of religion, but will be delightful. And we may appeal herein to the judgments of such as shall allow themselves to consider, whether the matter do not evidently appear to be so upon a serious review and on revolving with themselves of the several gracious operations, that proceed from the holy rectitude mentioned in the former part. Thus the acts even of repentance, self-abasement, self-denial, self-devoting, appearing to be in them-

selves most fit and becoming things, and really without force proceeding (as they cannot but do) from a rectified and well disposed heart,—how can they but be pleasant? And it is much in our way to the experiencing of such delight, to be at a point with ourselves, and well resolved wherein it is to be sought and found.

6. However all the acts and operations of true and living religion be in themselves delightful, yet apply yourselves to the doing of them for a higher reason and with a greater design than your own delight. Otherwise you destroy your own work therein, and despoil your acts of their substantial moral goodness, and consequently of their delightfulness also. That is not a morally good act, which is not referred to God, or not done out of, at least, an habitual devotedness to him, so as that he be the supreme end thereof. You would therefore, by withdrawing and separating this reference to God, ravish from your acts their very life and soul, and perfectly nullify those of them that should be in themselves acts of religion. Since therefore they are only delightful as they are vital acts proceeding from a principle of divine life, and habitual devotedness to God is a very comprehensive and most radical principle, you would, by designing your own delight supremely, counteract yourself, and cross your own end; you would make them acts of idolatry, not of religion; and set up your own self as the idol of jealousy, that receives the homage of them, instead of God: whereby the unlawful

pleasure, which you would engross to yourselves, will turn all to gall and wormwood, and be bitterness in the end.

That therefore you may taste the sweetness and pleasure which belong to a religious godly life, your way must be to act on directly forward in the simplicity of your heart, doing all that you do, to and for God. And thus that pleasure, because it is natural to such acts, will of its own accord result and arise to you ; and so much the more, the less you design for yourself in what you do. From that uprightness and sincerity of heart towards God, it can never be separated. But to be a religious epicure,—to pray, hear, meditate, do acts of justice and charity, only to please and humour yourselves, and that you may derive a kind of solace and satisfaction from your own work,—is to undo your design, and blast the delight which you cover. It follows, while you seek it not ; it flies from you, while you so inordinately seek it.

7. Yet disallow not yourself to taste and enjoy the pleasure of well doing ; and, secondarily and in due subordination, design and endeavour that you may do so. It is in itself a lawful pleasure, so that it be not sought and entertained out of its own place. It is a promised pleasure, “The good man,” it is said, “shall be satisfied from himself;”^a and it is by particular direction to be testified to the righteous, “They shall eat the fruit of their own doings.”^b It is God’s gracious

^a Prov. xiv. 14.

^b Isa. xiii. 10.

allowance to them, which it is a part of gratitude and dutifulness to esteem and accept,—yea, and with great admiration of the divine goodness, which has made and settled such a connection between their duty and their delight, and which has laid such laws upon them, that in the keeping thereof there is great reward ;^a —whereas they might have been enjoined a meaner servitude, and, by the condition and kind of their work, been kept strangers to any thing of delight therein.

That thankful acknowledgment of the bounty and goodness of God to them in the very constitution of his laws and government, is become a part of their duty, which cannot be done without previous relishes of the sweetness and goodness of their other duty. They are required in every thing to give thanks :^b and it is said, they shall go on in their way as the redeemed of the Lord, with everlasting joy upon their heads ;^c that they shall sing in the ways of the Lord :^d —which cannot be, if they take not notice that the ways of the Lord are pleasantness, and all his paths peace.^e Therefore you should designedly set yourself to taste the goodness and delightfulness of holy walking. And to that end, when you find the blessed cherishing warmth and vigour of God's gracious communication let in upon you, enlarging your hearts, making your way and work easy to you, and helping you to do with an untolsome felicity what he requires and calls

^a Ps. xix. 11.^b 1 Thess. v. 18.^c Isa. li. 11.^d Ps. cxxxviii. 5.^e Prov. iii. 17.

for, and to run the way of his commandments, so that you can do acts of piety, righteousness and mercy as natural acts, borne up by the power of a steady living principle acting in you, (as it is said, they that wait upon the Lord shall renew strength and mount up with wings as eagles, run without weariness, and walk without fainting,*) —you should reflect now and take notice, how good and pleasant is this; make your pause and deliberate; have your seasons of respiration and drawing breath; and then bethink yourself, and commune thus with your own heart,—How do I now like the way and service of the Lord, a life of pure devotedness to him, a course of regular walking in thorough subjection to his laws and government; and how, that the course of my actions should be as a continual sacrificing, doing all to him and for him. Do you not now rejoice, that you find yourself offer willingly? Can you forbear with gratitude and joy to acknowledge to him, that it is of his own hand that you do this? You should now compare your present with your former state and temper, and consider,—How much better it is to me to live in his fear, love and communion, than to be as once I was, alienated from the life of God, and as without God in the world! Now I can trust and obey, once I could not: now, when the opportunity invites, I am in some readiness to serve him, created to good works, a vessel fitted to my Master's use; some time, I was to every good

* Isa. xl. 31.

work reprobate.—Surely it is most becoming, to take a free complacency in this blessed change ;—that is, not with a proud pharisaical gloriation to say, “ God, I thank thee that I am not as other men,” or, trusting in yourself that you are righteous, to despise others ; but with a mean estimation of yourself and of all you can do, and with a deep and constant sense that, when you have done all you can, you are an unprofitable servant, and do but your duty ; yet blessing God, that since he hath made such things your duty, he also in some measure enables you to do it, and that he has reconciled and attempered your heart to your way and work, and made it pleasant to you :—not hypocritically arrogating all to yourself, under the formal and false show of thanksgiving to him, or aiming only more colourably to introduce a vain boast and ostentation of yourself, in the form of gratulation to God ; but as having a heart inwardly possessed with the humble sense, Who it is that hath made you to differ, not only from other men but from yourself also.

8. And because that disposedness of heart to such a course of holy practice may not be constantly actual, and equally sensible at all times, —that all delight in the ways of God may not hereupon cease and be broken off, (which in those sadder intervals cannot but suffer a great diminution,) you must take heed that, as to the distempers and indispositions you now discern in your own spirit, you neither indulge yourself nor despair, but take the proper course of redress.

To indulge yourself in them were mortal. You

should bethink yourself, that if you yield to a slothful sluggish temper of spirit, which you now feel coming on upon you, shortly you shall have nothing sensibly remaining to you of your religion, but the dead and empty form. How waste and desolate a thing will that be!—as if you should come into a deserted house, where you were wont pleasantly to converse with most delectable friends, and now you find nothing but cold bare walls. How dismal will it be, when only the same duties, the same external frame and acts of worship remain, but the spirit of life and power, which was wont to breath in them, is retired and gone! What, will you take up with that delusive unconvertible shadow, and be content to embrace the stiff and breathless carcase that remains? You find, perhaps, your spirit sinking into carnality, an earthly temper of mind gradually seizing on you,—worldly thoughts, cares, desires and fears, invading your heart. By the same degrees that these come on, life retires; you grow listless toward God; your heart is not in your religion, as heretofore; you keep up your fashion of praying and of doing other accustomed duties, but you languish in them. Can you here be content to lie still and die,—and rather choose to suffer the pains of death, than that labour by which your soul might yet live? Is this a time to roll yourself upon your slothful bed, and say, “Soul, take thine ease,” even upon the pit’s brink? Do not settle the matter so. Think not of making a covenant with death; it is not so gentle a thing as your slothful temper makes you think. Account the

state intolerable, wherein you are so manifestly tending towards it. Think not well of yourself and your present case. What reason soever any have to be pleased and delighted with the course of lively converse with God, and of walking in the Spirit; so much reason you have to be displeased with yourself, as your case now is, and to dislike and abhor the present temper of your own soul. If the life of religion, and its vigorous exercises be delightful, by that very reason it appears, its faint and sickly languishings are not so.

Know, therefore that self-indulgence is most unsuitable and dangerous. Labour to awaken in yourselves some sense of your condition. Think—whither am I going? Represent to your own soul the terrors of death. Admit the impression thereof. Behold its frightful visage, and be startled at it. Recount with yourself what you shall be, if God, who is your life, quite depart; if this shall never be, yet know that your fear, lest it should be, is the means of your preservation. And let the apprehension of the tendency of your distemper excite in you that just and seasonable fear. How sure soever you are of the principle, that God will never utterly forsake those that are his,—as most certainly he never will,—yet you cannot be so sure of your application of it to yourself, as your case stands, but that there will be room for this fear;—therefore let it be entertained.

But though you admit a just and very solicitous *fear*, be sure that you exclude not hope: though

you apprehend your case dangerous, look not upon it as desperate. Your hope must not be in yourself, but in him that raises the dead, and calleth things that are not, as though they were; yea, makes them exist and be. But if you cast away all hope, you yield yourself to perish. This stops your breath; so that even all strugglings for life, and the very gaspings of your fainting heart must immediately cease and end in perfect death. The danger of your case, bad as it is, calls not for this; nor will the exigency of it comport with it. When once the soul says there is no hope,^a it immediately proceeds to say, I have loved strangers and after them will I go. Your hope is as necessary to your safety, as your fear; we are saved by hope,^b i. e. of the end itself,—which therefore animates to all the encounters and difficulties of our way, as well from within as from without. Great distempers appear in you and often return,—such as are of a threatening aspect and tendency. You should yet consider, you are under cure, the prescribed means and method whereof are before you. There is balm in Gilead, and a physician there;—one, in whose hands none that trusted him ever miscarried. It is well, if you find yourself sick. The whole need him not, and will not therefore commit themselves to his care. He hath relieved many such as you, who apprehending their case have been restored to him; let them despair, that know no such way of help. Say within yourself,—

^a Jer. ii. 25.^b Rom. viii. 24.

Though I am fallen and low, I shall rise and stand, renewed by thee, O my God.—Was there never such a time with you before, when in the like case you cried to the Lord and he answered you, and strengthened you with strength in your soul?^a Say within yourself,—Why art thou cast down, O my soul, hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.^b And this very hope, as it preserves life, so it preserves the delight and pleasure of life from being quite extinct. It is pleasant to consider, that the state, wherein saints on earth are, is a state of recovery; that though it be not a state of perfect health, yet it is not a state of death; but such wherein they are tending to life, in the perfection of it. Their frequent and very faulty relapses shall be found the more to magnify the skill and patience of their great physician. Therefore, however you are not hence to be secure, yet let not your hearts sink into an abject despair and sullen discontent. Let there be tender relentings after God. Your heart ought often to smite you, that you have not been more careful and watchful; but admit not a thought, that you should therefore cast off all hope, or that it is in vain ever to strive more, or to seek to recover that good frame, which, you have often found, is so soon gone.

Instead of that, apply yourself with so much the more earnestness to the proper course of remedy. And therein you must know your own labour and

^a *Ps.* cxxxviii. 3.

^b *Ps.* xlii. 11.

diligence : your contentions with yourself must have a great place ; otherwise it would never have been said, “Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die,”^a and “Give all diligence to add to your faith virtue,”^b &c. Such things would never have been charged as duty upon you, if you had nothing to do. You must expect to be dealt with as a sort of creatures capable of understanding your own concerns, —not to be hewed and hammered as senseless stones, that are ignorant of the artist’s intent, but as living ones, to be polished and fitted to the spiritual building, by a hand that reasonably expects your own compliance and co-operation to its known design :—unto which design though you must know you are to be subservient, and must do something, yet you must withal consider, you can be but subservient, and of yourselves can do just nothing. If ever you would know, what a life of spiritual delight means, you must constantly strive against all your spiritual distempers that obstruct it, in the power of the Holy Ghost. And do not think that is enjoining you a course wholly out of your power ; for though it be true, that the power of the Holy Ghost is not naturally yours or at your disposal, yet, by gracious vouchsafement and ordination, it is. If it were not so, what means that exhortation, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,”^c and that, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit ;”^d with

^a Rev. iii. 2. ^b 2 Peter. i. 10. ^c Eph. vi. 10. ^d Gal. v. 25.

the foregoing prescription of "Walking in the Spirit, that we might not fulfil the lusts of the flesh?"^a Doth the Holy Ghost himself prescribe to us impertinently, in order to our obtaining of his own imparted influences? Doth not he know the method and way, wherein they are to be conveyed? Or would he deceive us by misrepresenting it? In short, *walking in the Spirit* must signify something; and what can it signify less than dependence on its power, and subjection thereto, with the continuance of both these? These therefore (dependence and subjection) are necessary to the making of that power our own.

1. Dependence and trust—as that phrase imports, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God."^b And that, "I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in his name,"^c at once shews us both the communication of the divine power—"I will strengthen them in the Lord,"—and the way wherein it is communicated,—*their walking up and down in his name*,—viz. in actual and continued dependence thereon. The blessed God hath settled this connexion between our faith and his own exerted power. The extraordinary works of the Spirit were not done, but upon the exercise of the extraordinary faith, which, by the divine constitution, was requisite thereunto: so that the infidelity, which consisted in the privation of this faith, did sometimes (so inviolable had that constitution made that connexion) in a manner bind up

^a Gal. v. 16.

Ps. lxxi. 16.

^c Zech. x. 12.

the power of God,—“ And he could do no mighty works there,”^a “ And he marvelled because of their unbelief:” “ Why could not we cast him out?” “ Because of your unbelief.”^b Nor are the works of the Holy Ghost, that are common upon all sincere Christians, done, but upon the intervening exercise of that more common faith.^c Therefore is this shield to be taken, above all the other parts of the divine armature, as sufficient to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; therefore are we said to be kept by the power of God through faith:^d and more expressly in terms to our present purpose, “ We are to receive the promise of the Spirit (i. e. the Spirit promised) through faith.”^e Hereby we draw the power of that Almighty Spirit into a consent and co-operation with our spirit. So the great God suffers Himself, his own arm and power, to be taken hold of by us. He is engaged, when he is trusted; that trust being, in this case, not a rash and unwarrantable presuming upon him, but such whereto he hath himself given the invitation and encouragement. So that when we reflect upon the promises, wherein the gift of the Spirit is conveyed, or wherein the express grant thereof is folded up,^f we may say, “ Remember thy word to thy servant, wherein thou hast caused me to hope.”^g And then, surely, He will not frustrate the expectation, which he hath himself been the

^a Mark vi. 5, 6.^b Mat. xvii. 19, 20.^c Eph. vi. 16.^d 1 Pet. i. 5.^e Gal. iii. 14.^f Prov. i. 23.

Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

^g Ps. cxix. 49.

author of. He would never have induced those to trust in him, whom he intended to disappoint. That free Spirit,—which, as the wind, blows where it listeth,—now permits itself to be brought under bonds, even the bonds of God's own covenant, whereof we now take hold by our faith; so that he will not fail to give forth his influence, so far as shall be necessary for the maintaining a resolution in us of stedfast adherence to God and his service, and retaining a dominion over undue inclinations and affections.

How express and peremptory are those words, “This I say,”—as if he had said, I know what I say, I have well weighed the matter, and speak not at random,—“Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh!” And so much as this affords great matter of rational delight, though more sensible transports (which are not so needful to us, and in reference whereto the spirit retains its liberty) be not so frequent. Therefore, if we aim at the having our spirits placed and settled in the secret of the divine presence, and entertained with the delights of it,—if we would know and have the sensible proof of that religion, which is all life and power and consequently sweetness and pleasure, our direct way is believing on the Spirit.

That very trust is his delight, “He taketh pleasure in them that hope in his mercy.”^a It is that, whereby we give him divine honour, the homage and acknowledgment proper to a Deity; confessing

^a Ps. cxlvii. 11.

ourselves impotent and insufficient to think any thing as of ourselves,^a we rely upon his sustaining hand, and own our sufficiency to be from him. It is his delight to be depended on as a father by his children. He is pleased, that title should be given him—"The Father of spirits,"^b—to have the spirits, which are his offspring, gathering about him, especially those who, being revolted from him and become sensible of their misery by their revolt, now upon his invitation apply themselves, and say, "Lo, now we come to thee, thou art the Lord our God,"—craving his renewed communications, drawing from him vital influences and the breath of life, adoring his boundless fulness that filleth all in all. And when we thus give him his delight, we shall not long want ours.

But then we must also add, secondly, subjection to our dependence—a willing obedient surrender and resignation of ourselves to the conduct and guidance of that blessed Spirit,—a dutiful yielding to his dictates, so that they have actually with us the governing binding force and power of a law, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ."^c Great care must be taken of grieving^d and quenching^e the Spirit, of rebelling and vexing it,^f of resisting it,^g of striving against it,^h of despiting the Spirit of grace;ⁱ a wickedness, aggravated by the very style and title there given

^a 2 Cor. iii. 5.^b Heb. xii. 9.^c Rom. viii. 2.^d Eph. iv. 30.^e 1 Thess. v. 19.^f Isa. lxiii. 10.^g Acts vii. 51.^h Gen. vi. 3.ⁱ Heb. x. 29.

it, *the spirit of grace*; and to which only such a vengeance, as is intimated in what follows, (which, it peculiarly belonged to God himself to inflict,) could be proportionable. When we permit ourselves entirely to the government of the Holy Ghost, thereby to have our spirits and ways framed and directed according to his own rules, his quickening influence and the pleasure and sweet relishes thereof will not be withheld.

And if the experience of some Christians seem not constantly to answer this, who complain they pray often for the Spirit and desire earnestly its gracious communications, but find little of them, —they are concerned seriously to reflect and bethink themselves, whether their distrust or disobedience, or both, have not made them desolate. Surely we are altogether faulty in this matter; his promise and faithfulness do not fail, his Spirit is not straitened: but we either do not entirely commit and entrust ourselves to his guidance, or do not obediently comply with it; we indulge either our sluggishness or our contrary inclinations, resist his dictates, are intractable and wayward, not apt to be led by the Spirit, and hence provoke him to withdraw from us. Hereto we are in justice to impute it, that we find so little of that power moving in us, all the motions whereof are accompanied with so much delight.

For excitation—Little, one would think, should be needful more than only that we should bethink ourselves, what all this while we have been directed to by this text. If that be once under-

stood, hath it not in itself invitation enough? Do we need further to be invited to a life of delight? Do we need to be pressed with arguments to choose delightful and wholesome food, rather than gall and wormwood, or even very poison? It is a sad argument of the deplorable state of man, that he should need arguments in such a case! But because much is to be said hereafter, to persuade unto delighting in God (considered in the stricter notion of it, such as will be applicable to this purpose), therefore little is intended to be said here.

Only it is to be considered,—Do you intend to proceed in any course of religion, or no? If not, you are to be remitted to such discourses, as prove to you the reasonableness and necessity of it.

But if you think that horrid, and resolve to own something or other of religion, will you here use your understanding and consider,—Is it indeed so horrid a thing to disavow all religion? what is it better, to pretend to it to no purpose? You find religion is all but show and shadow, mere empty vanity and mockery, which is not delightful. If you will not choose a better because it is delightful, (as you are not advised to do, for that as your chief reason,) yet at least choose that which is, in other more considerable respects, eligible, as being most honourable and pleasing to Him that made you, and only safe and profitable to yourself. What shall your religion serve for, that will not answer these purposes?

If you will have a religion, and you have any

reason for that resolution, by the same reason you must have the pleasant delightful religion we speak of. You have no other choice. There is no other that will serve your turn. And, therefore, what has been said to divert you from the other, ought to persuade you to the choice of this. Besides, since there is so much of secret delight in true substantial religion, that ought not to signify nothing with you. If we consider the delightfulness of it alone, upon that single account it surely challenges the preference, before that which is neither profitable nor delightful.

Whether it is in itself so delightful, if you had nothing to inform you but the report of such as profess to have tried and found it so, methinks that at least should provoke you also to try. How sluggish a temper doth it argue, not to be desirous to know the utmost that is in it! It were even a laudable curiosity, to resolve upon making trial; to get into the inmost centre of it; to pierce and press onward, till you reach the seat of life, till you have got the secret, and the very heart of religion and your heart meet and join in one. Did you never try experiments for your pleasure? try this one. See what you will find in withdrawing yourself from all things else, and becoming entirely devoted to God through the Redeemer, to live after his will and in his presence. Try the difference—between viewing truths to please your genius, or using divine ordinances to keep up the custom, and help to make *a solemn show*—and doing these things with a

serious design to get into an acquaintance with God, and to have your soul transformed into his image, that you may have present and eternal fellowship with him. Try how much better it is to have your lives governed by an awful and dutiful respect to God, than to follow your own wild and enormous inclinations; and whether it be not better, what good soever you do, to do it for the Lord's sake, than from base and sordid motives.

Why should you be of so mean and abject a spirit, as to content yourselves to be held at the door and in the outer courts of religion, when others enter in, and taste the rich provisions of God's house? Why will you distinguish yourselves by so debasing a character? It is a just and commendable ambition, to be as forward here as the best. Why will you suffer other men to enter into the kingdom of God before you,—even that kingdom which consists in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost!

You cannot but have, if you consider, somewhat more to assure you of the delightfulness of religion, than the mere report of others; for your own reason and conscience cannot but so pronounce, if you go to the particulars that have been instanced. If you acknowledge a God, and consider yourself as a reasonable creature made by him and depending on him, you cannot but see, it is fit your spirit should be so framed and affected towards him, towards your fellow-creatures of your own order, and your present and future state, as has been before in some measure

(though very defectively) represented ; and that it must needs be very pleasant, if it were so. You can frame in your mind an idea of a life transacted according to such rectified inclinations ; and when you have done so, do but solemnly appeal to your own judgment, whether that were not a very delectable life ? And thereupon bethink yourself, what your case is, if you cannot actually relish a pleasure in that which, your own judgment tells you, is so highly pleasurable.

Will you dream and slumber all your days ? How much time have you lost, that might have been pleasantly spent in a course of godliness ! Do you not aim at a life of eternal delights with God ? If you now begin not to live to God, when will you ? That life, which you reckon shall never end with you, must yet have a beginning. Will you defer, till you die, your beginning to live ? Have you any hope, that God will deal in a way with you differently from all men, and make the other world the place of your first heart-change ? How dismal should it be to you, to look in and still find your heart dead towards God and the things of God, so that you have no delight in them. Think, what the beginnings of the divine life, and the present delights of it, must be the earnest of to you, and betime make sure the ground of so great a hope.

CHAPTER III.

Appeal to such as are Strangers to delight in God.

I NOW pass on to the discourse of delighting in God, under the other more strict notion of it, viz. as the very act of delight hath its direct exercise upon himself. So we are to consider this delight, not as a thing some way adherent to all other duties of religion, but as a distinct duty of itself, that requires a solemn and direct application of ourselves thereunto. For though it seems little to be doubted, but there is in this precept a part of religion put for the whole—as having a real influence, and conferring with its name a grateful savour and tincture upon the whole,—it would yet be very unreasonable, not to take special notice of that part, from whence the entire frame of religion has its name. And having shewn the nature of this duty already in the former part, what is now to be said must more directly concern the practice of it, and will, as the case requires, fall into two kinds of discourse, viz. expostulation concerning the omission of such practice, and invitation thereunto.

In both these kinds it is requisite, we apply ourselves to two sorts of persons, viz. such whose spirits are wholly averse and alien to it ;

and such as, though not altogether unpractised, are very defective in it, and neglect it too much.

Both sorts are to be expostulated with ; and no doubt, the great God hath a just quarrel with mankind (whom these two sorts comprehend) upon the one or the other of these accounts ; wherein it is fit, we should plead with men for his sake and their own. And, 1. with the former sort,—those who are altogether disaffected to God, alienated and enemies in their minds through wicked works, and at the utmost distance from delighting in him. To such, our expostulation should aim at their conviction, both of the matter of fact that thus the case is with them, and of the great iniquity and evil of it.

First, It is needful we endeavour to fasten upon such a conviction, that this is the state of their case. For while His Being is not flatly denied, men think it generally creditable to be professed lovers of God, and reckon it so odious a thing not to be so, that they who are even most deeply guilty, are not easily brought to confess enmity to him, but flatter themselves in their own eyes, till their iniquity be found to be hateful. The difficulty of making such apprehend themselves diseased, that their minds are under the power of this dreadful distemper; that it is not well with spirits in this respect,—is the great obstruction to their cure.

But I suppose you, to whom I now apply myself, to acknowledge the Bible to be God's word *and* that you profess reverence to the truth and *authority of that word*, and will yield to be tried

by it.' First, therefore, you must be supposed such as believe the account true, which that book gives of the common state of man,—that it is a state of apostacy from God,—that the Lord looking down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if any understand and seek God, finds they are all gone aside,^a i. e. gone off from him. Every one of them is gone back,^b (or revolted, as it is expressed in the parallel Psalm); there is none that doth good, no not one;^c (which is quoted by the Apostle to the intent, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may become guilty before God.^d) This is then a common case; and as the same Apostle charges it upon the Gentiles, that they were haters of God,^e so does our Saviour as expressly on the Jews, (who no doubt thought themselves as innocent of this crime as you,) that they had seen and hated both Him and his Father. And when it is said of men, that they were by nature the children of wrath, (they to whom he writes, even as others,) do you think that is spoken of any lovers of God, as being their present state? or that, when all by nature are children of wrath, any are by nature lovers of Him, so as to love him and be under his wrath both at once? It is likely then, that against so plain evidence—while you confess yourselves men—you will not deny you were sometimes haters of God. Well then, is the case altered with you? It is a conviction against you, that you are of human race, till it can be evidenced you are born

^a Ps. xiv. 3. ^b Ps. liii. 3. ^c Rom. iii. 10. ^d Ver. 19.

^e Rom. i. 30.

from above, and are become new creatures. And do you find this? It is not to be expected, you should be able to tell the very moment, when you ceased from your enmity against God, and became his friends, or give a punctual account of every turn or motion of thoughts in such a change: but it is to be supposed, the work was not done upon you in your sleep, so as that you could have no consciousness of what was doing. However, comparing what you sometimes were with what you are, what difference do you observe? What, were you sometimes haters of God, and are you now come to love and delight in him, without perceiving in yourselves any difference? Bethink yourselves, is not the temper of your spirits toward God just such as it was always wont to be, without any remarkable turn or alteration? That is a shrewd presumption against you, that your case is most deplorable.

2. What is your present temper, considered in itself? You love God and delight in him,—how do you make it appear? wherein does that friendly and dutiful affection towards him evidence itself? Surely love and hatred are not one and the same with you. Whereby would you discern your hatred towards one, whom you most flatly and peremptorily disaffect? You would dislike the thoughts of him, hate his memory, cast him out of your thoughts. Do you not in the same way shew your disaffection to God? Do you not find, that a wicked man is branded and distinguished thus, “God is not in all his thoughts?”^a Are not they

^a Ps. x. 4.

who shall be turned into hell, described thus, "The people that forget God;"* that is, who forget him willingly, or from the habitual inclination of their hearts? And is not that your case? What could hinder you to remember him, if you were so disposed?

"But, you say, you often forget your *friends*, or those at least to whom you are sure you bear no ill will; and what friend would expect to be always in your thoughts?" It is answered, you disrelish not the remembrance of a friend—do you not disrelish the thoughts of God? You say, you do not think on your absent friends, while no present occasion occurs to bring them to your remembrance. But is God absent? Is he far from any one of us? Have you not daily before your eyes, things enough to bring him to mind; while his glorious works surround you, and you live, move and have your being in him, and your breath is in his hand? Have you that dependence on any friend? Are you under so much obligation to any?—"But you often do not think on friends, with whom you have no opportunity to converse." Have you no opportunity to converse with Him? Your friends can lay no such law upon you, as to have them much in your thoughts. It argues a depraved inclination, not to do herein what you ought and are bound to do. You cannot, by the exercise of your thoughts, obtain the presence of a *friend*:—you might obtain a most comfortable *Divine* presence.

* Psalm ix. 17.

And what though you think not of many to whom you bear no ill will, nor have any converse with many such;—Is it enough to bear no ill will to God? Will that suffice you for delighting in him? Are you no more concerned to mind God and converse with him, than with the man you never knew? Your unconversableness with God, and unmindfulness of him, can proceed from nothing but ill will to Him,—who daily offers himself to your converse, who seeks and invites your acquaintance, who would have you inwardly know him, and lead your lives with him. Why is it that you do not so, but that you like not to retain him in your knowledge? This is the sense and language of your hearts towards him, “Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” It can proceed from nothing but ill will and a disagreeable temper, that you shun the converse of one that seeks yours, that you will take no notice of one that often offers himself to your view, one that meets you at every turn, and aims to draw your eye, yet cannot gain a look. When such is your deportment towards God, that he passes by you, and you perceive him not, that he compasses you about behind and before, and is acquainted with all your ways, and with him and his ways you will have no acquaintance, but remain alienated from the life of God, and as without him in the world, is not this downright enmity? Or can this deportment agree with that habitual and frequent actual delight in God, which is required?

Again, Would you not be justly taken to dis-

affect one whose temper is ungrateful, whose disposition and way is displeasing to you? Is it not thus with you towards God? When you hear of the purity and holiness of his nature, his abhorrence of all wickedness, and how detestable to him every thing is that is impure, and that he will not endure it; do not your hearts regret this quality (as we must conceive of it) in the nature of God? Yet this, because it is his very nature, so much the more certainly infers, that a dislike of it cannot but include disaffection to himself, and that habitual and constant; since his whole way of dealing with men, and the course of his government over the world, do (and shall more discernibly) savour of it. Do you not wish him not to be, in this respect, what he is;—which is, in effect, to wish him not to be at all? And doth this import no enmity? Can this consist with delight in him?

Are you not disaffected to him, when, not being able to accuse him of falsehood, and having the greatest imaginable assurances of the impossibility that he should deceive, you will yet by no means be induced to trust? Consider, what doth your trust in God signify, more than the sound of the name? Doth it quiet your heart, in reference to any affairs which you pretend to commit to him? Doth it purify it, and check your ill inclinations, in any thing wherein they should be countermanded upon the credit of his word? What doth his testimony, concerning the future things you have not seen, weigh with you, to the altering of *your course*, and rendering it such as may com-

port and square with the belief of such things? Would not the word of an ordinary man, premonishing you of any advantage or danger, which you have no other knowledge of, be of more value with you? Constant suspicion of any one without cause or pretence, most certainly argues rooted enmity. You love him not, whom you cannot trust.

Do you love him, whom upon all occasions you most causelessly displease, whose offence you reckon nothing of? Is that ingenuous towards a friend, or dutiful towards a father or a Lord? How do you, in this, carry yourself towards the blessed God? Are you wont to displease yourselves, to please him; or cross your own will, to do his? Do you take delight in him, whom you make no difficulty to vex, whose known declared pleasure—though you confess him greater, wiser, and more righteous than yourself—you have no more regard to, when it crosses your own inclination, than you would have to that of your child, your slave, or a fool?

Have you any thing to except against that measure and character of loyal affection to your Redeemer and Lord, “If ye love me, keep my commandments;” “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you;” “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments?” Do you not disobey the known will of God in your ordinary practice, without regret? Do you not know it to be his will, that you strive to enter at the strait gate; that you seek first the kingdom *of heaven*; that you keep your heart with all

diligence; that you deny yourself, crucify the flesh, be temperate, just, merciful, patient? Do you aim at obeying him in these things? Can you say, "Lord, for thy sake I refrain the things, to which my heart inclines?" Hath his prohibition any restraining force upon your heart? Do you not allow yourself to be licentious, earthly, vain, proud, wrathful, revengeful, though you know it will offend him? And is this your love to him, or delight in him?

Do you bear good will to him, whose reproach and dishonour you are not concerned for, yea, whom you stick not to dishonour and reproach, whose interest among men hath no place in your thoughts, whose friends are none of yours, whose enemies are your friends, whose favour you care not for, nor regret his frowns, whose worship is a burden to you (so that you had rather do any thing than pray to him), and his fellowship an undesired thing? Make an estimate by these things of the temper of your hearts towards God; and consider, whether it bespeak delight in him, or not rather habitual aversion and enmity.

It may be, you will admit these things seem to carry somewhat of conviction with them, but say, "they concern many that are taken for godly persons and lovers of God, as well as they do you." It may be, many such may take themselves for godly persons and lovers of God, and be mistaken as well as you; what will that amend your cause? If these things will prove a person one that hath no delight in God, they

equally prove it as to you and others,—which will make nothing to your advantage.

But if they who have sincere love to God, are in a degree peccant against the laws of such love, they are more ready to accuse themselves than other men ; they abhor themselves, that they do not more entirely delight in God, and repent in dust and ashes. It better becomes you, to imitate their repentance, than glory in their sinful weakness. When did you check and contend with your own hearts upon these accounts, as they are wont to do ? If these things, in a degree found in them, prove their delight in God imperfect, their prevailing contraries will however prove it sincere. If you will not now understand the difference between the imperfection or the total want of his love, between having your heart and soul imperfectly alive towards God or perfectly dead,—God grant you may not hereafter, at a more costly rate.

You may further say, God is out of your sight, and therefore how can it be expected you should find a sensible delight in him ? But is he out of the sight of your minds ? If he be, what would you infer, but that you cannot delight in him at all, and therefore that you do not. He is out of sight by the high excellency of his Being,—for which reason, he should be delighted in with a deeper delight, though not like that you take in the things of sense,—and he hath been so beyond all things, notwithstanding his abode in that light which is inaccessible. This therefore is con-

fession without excuse; and would never be offered as an excuse by any, but those who are lost in flesh and sense, who have forgot they have reasonable souls, and had rather be numbered with brutes than men. As if there were not many things you have not seen with the eyes of flesh, more excellent than those you have! Or, as if you had no other faculty than eyes of flesh to see with!

Do you not acknowledge the blessed God to be the best and most excellent good? as being the first and fountain good, the fullest and most comprehensive, the purest, the most immutable and permanent good? How plain and certain is this! How manifestly impossible is it, if there were not such a good, that otherwise any thing else should ever have been good, or been at all! Is not this as sure and evident, as any thing your senses can inform you of? Whence is the glorious excellency of this great creation, or the beauty, loveliness, pleasantness of any creature? Must not all that, and infinitely more, be originally in the great Creator of all? This, if you consider, you cannot but see and own.

While then your own hearts tell you, you delight not in God, do not your consciences begin to accuse and judge you, that you deal not righteously in this matter? And ought it not to fill your souls with horror, when you consider that you take no delight in the best and sovereign good,—when you look into your hearts, and find that you not only do not delight in God, but you *cannot*, and this, from the want not of the natural

power, but of a right inclination ? Should you not with astonishment bethink yourselves, every one for himself,—“ What is this that is befallen me ; I am convinced, this is the best good, every way most worthy of my highest delight and love, and yet my heart tastes it not !” You can have no pretence to say, that because your heart is disinclined, therefore you are excused ; for you only do not what, through an invincible disinclination, you apprehend you cannot do. But you should bethink yourself, “ What a wretch am I, that am so ill inclined !” For is not any one more wicked, according as he is more strongly inclined to wickedness, and averse to what is good ? But how vincible or invincible your disinclination is, you do not yet know, not having yet made due trial. That you cannot of yourselves overcome, is out of question : but have you tried, what help might be got from heaven, in the use of God’s own prescribed means ? If that course bring you in no help, then may you understand how much you have provoked the Lord. For though he hath promised, that for such as turn at his reproof, he will pour out his spirit to them ; yet they who, when he calls, refuse,—and when he stretches out his hand, regard not, but set at naught all his counsel,—may call and not be answered, may seek him early and not find him.* And that wickedness may somewhat be estimated by this effect, that it makes the Spirit of grace retire, makes that free, benign, merciful Spirit,

* Prov. i. 28.

the author of all love, sweetness, and goodness, become to a forlorn soul a resolved stranger. If you are so given up, you have first given up yourselves; you have wilfully cast him out of your thoughts, and hardened your own hearts against Him, who was the spring of your life and being, and in whom is all your hope. And whether this malignity of your hearts shall ever finally be overcome or no,—as you have no cause to despair but it may be overcome, if, apprehending your life to lie upon it, you wait and strive, and pray and cry, as your case requires,—yet do you not see it to be a fearful pitch of malignity? and so much the worse and more vicious, the more hardly it is overcome?

That we may here be a little more particular: Consider, how tumultuous and disorderly a thing this your disaffection is. You are here to consider its direct tendency, or what it doth in its own nature lead to. If *you* may withdraw your delight and love from God, then so may all other men as well. Therefore, now view the thing itself in the common nature of it. Is not aversion to delight in God a manifest contrariety to the order of things, a turning of all upside down, a shattering and breaking asunder the bond between rational appetite and the first good? Is it not a disjoining and unhinging of the best and noblest part of God's creation from its station and rest, its proper basis and centre? How fearful a rupture doth it make! If you could break in pieces the orderly contexture of the whole universe within itself, reduce the

frame of nature to utmost confusion, rout all the ranks and orders of creatures, tear asunder the heavens, and dissolve the compacted body of the earth, mingle heaven and earth together, and resolve the world into a mere heap,—you had not done so great a spoil, as in breaking the primary and supreme tie and bond between the creature and his Maker, yea, between the Creator of all things and his more noble and excellent creature. All the relations, aptitudes, and inclinations of the creatures to one another are but inferior and subordinate to those between the creatures and their common Author and Lord: and, here, the corruption of the best cannot but be worst of all.

Again—What an unnatural wickedness is it! To hate thy own original, to disaffect the most bountiful Author of thy life and being! What wouldst thou say, if thy own son hated the very sight of thee, and abhorred thy presence and converse? especially, if thou never gavest him the least cause, if thou hast been always kind and indulgent, full of paternal affection towards him? Wouldst thou not think him a vile miscreant, and reckon the earth too good to bear him? But how little, and in how low a capacity, didst thou contribute to his being, in comparison of what the great God did to thine. How little of natural excellency hast thou above him,—it may be, in many things, besides this unhappy temper, he much excels thee; whereas thou knowest, in thy Maker is infinite excellency beyond what thou *canst pretend to*. And what cause canst thou

pretend for disaffection towards him? Many good works hath He done for thee; for which of these dost thou hate him? Whereby hath he ever dis-obliged thee? With how sweet and gentle allurements hath he sought to win thy heart? And is it not most vilely unnatural, that thy spirit should be so sullenly averse to Him, who is pleased to be styled the Father of Spirits? Is not he thy Father?^a If thou didst hate thy own self, if thou didst hate thy very life and being, and wert laying daily plots of self-destruction, thou wert not so wickedly unnatural. He is more intimate to thee, than thou art to thyself. That natural love which thou owest to thyself, and the nature from whence it springs, are from him, and ought to be subordinate to him. By a superior law of nature, thy very life, if he actually require it, ought to be sacrificed and laid down for his sake. Thy hatred towards him, therefore, is more prodigiously unnatural, than if it were most directly and implacably bent against thyself.

In hating him, thou dost most mischievously hate thyself too; and all that thou doest by the instinct of that vile temper of heart towards him, thou doest it against thy own life and soul. Thou cuttest thyself off from him who is thy life; and art laying a train for the blowing up of thy eternal hope. All that hate him love death.^b

Further, it is the most comprehensive wickedness, and which entirely contains all other in it.

^a Deut. xxxii. 6.

^b Prov. viii. 36.

For as the law of love is the universal and summary law, comprehending all duty, and as it enjoins love to God,—for love to men ought to be resolved into that, and must be for his sake,—so must disaffection to God be comprehensive of all sin, whereinto every kind of sin resolves itself. Dost thou not see then, how thou cancellest the obligation of all laws, while thou hast no delight in God? how thou offerest violence to the very knot and juncture, wherein they all meet and are infolded together? Not to delight in God—what can it be but the very top of rebellion? What will thy sobriety, thy justice, thy charity signify,—if thou hadst these to glory in,—while thou art habitually disaffected to thy God? Let men value thee for these, to whom thereby thou shewest some respect; but shall He, who knows thou bearest none to him?

It is a most reproachful contemptuous wickedness: to him, I mean, whom it most directly offends against! Carries it not in it most horrid contumely and indignity to the most high God? It is a practical denial of all those excellencies in him, that render and recommend him the most worthy object of our delight; it is more than saying, He is not good, holy, wise, just and true. Things may on the sudden be said that are not deliberately thought, and may be retracted the next breath; but a man's stated constant course signifies the apprehension, from which it proceeds, to be fixed, and that it is the settled habitual sense of his soul.

Since thou delightest in other things, whilst thou delightest not in him, this plainly imports it to be the constant sense of thy very heart, that those things are better than He. What is it, then, that hath thy delight and love? Whereon is thy heart set? Commune with thyself. Dost thou not tremble, when thou findest this to be thy very case, that thou may'st truly say, "I can delight in creatures, but not in God—can take pleasure in my friend, but none in Him—I must confess it to be the temper of my heart, that I love my father, mother, son or daughter more than Christ." Is it not then to be concluded from his own express word, that thou art not worthy of him,^a and canst not be his disciple?^b Nay, may'st thou not truly say, that thou lovest this base impure earth more than God—that thou takest more delight in thy companions in wickedness than in the blessed God—that thou canst allow thyself to riot with the luxurious, and not only do such things thyself, but take pleasure in them that do them—yea, and thyself takest pleasure to commit iniquity, but in the glorious holy God canst take no pleasure? Wouldst thou be content to carry the plain sense of thy heart written on thy forehead, and to proclaim to all the world, as thy resolved practical judgment, that thou accountest thy friends, thy relations, this vile and vanishing world, thy wicked associates, thine own impure lusts, better than God? Dost thou not yet see

^a Matt. x. 37.^b Luke xiv. 26.

the horrid vileness of thy own heart, in all this ? Art thou yet, for all this, a harmless innocent creature, an honest well-meaning man ?

Wilt thou not see, that thine heart goes against thy conscience, all this while—that thou disaffectest Him, in whom, thou knowest, thou should'st delight—that the temper of thy spirit is a continual affront to thy profession. Is not that an odious thing which thou so seekest to hide, and which, though thou art not loth to be guilty of it, thou art so very unwilling should be known ? And since thou art so very loth it should be known, how canst thou hold up thy head before that eye, that is as a flame of fire, that searches thy heart and tries thy reins, that observes thy wayward spirit, and sees with how obstinate an aversion thou declinest his acquaintance and converse ? Wilt thou stand before the glorious Majesty of heaven and earth, who knows thy disaffected heart, and say, it is but a small transgression thou hast been guilty of, in not loving him, and making him thy delight ? Dost thou think, this will pass for a little offence in the solemn judgment of the great day that is drawing on ? Or will thy heart endure, or thy hands be strong, when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, and thou shalt stand convicted before his tribunal, in the sight of angels and men, of having borne all thy days a false disloyal heart, full of malignity and ill-will to thy Sovereign Lord, whom thou wast so many ways obliged to serve and cleave to with delight and *love* ?

When the difference shall be visibly put between those that delighted in God and them that never did, when thou shalt be marked out as one that didst in heart depart from him all thy days, and be thereupon abandoned to the society of that horrid accursed crew, in whom only thou didst delight,—surely, thou wilt not then say, thy transgression was small.

CHAPTER IV.

Appeal to such as disuse or neglect the holy Practice of delighting in God.

WE are now to expostulate with another sort; who though they are not altogether unacquainted with this heavenly exercise of delighting in God, yet too much disuse it, and apply not themselves to it with that constancy and intention of soul, which the matter requires. And these we are to put upon the consideration of such evils, as either are included in this neglect, or are allied to it as either causing it, or being caused by it.

Those whom we now address, are to bethink themselves, what evil is included in their neglect of this part of holy practice. You are to judge of the evil of it, by its disagreement with those known and usual measures, to which our practice should be suitable, and by which, in reason and justice, it is to be estimated or censured; as, for instance, the divine law, conscience, experience, obligation by kindness,

stipulation, relation, profession, tendency of the new nature, dictates of God's Spirit, the course and drift of his design;—with all which it will be found to have very ill accord.

How directly opposite is it to the law of God! not only to his express written precept, but to that immutable eternal law which arises from our very natures, when referred to his! The binding force of that law doth not so much consist in this, that the thing to be done is such whereto our natures were originally inclined,—which yet is of great weight, they having been thus inclined and determined by our Maker himself, so that our inclination was in this case expressive of his will,—as in the natural unchangeable congruity of the thing itself. Therefore as to the things, whose constant fitness would render them matter of duty to us at all times, it was provided, that inclinations suitable to them should be planted in our natures from the beginning: but about things that were to be matter of duty for a time, having only a present fitness to some present juncture or state of affairs, it was sufficient that the divine pleasure should be signified in some way more suitable to their occasional and temporary use, and that it might not so certainly extend to all men and all times.

The great law of love to God, which comprehends this of delighting in him, is, you may be sure, of that former sort; it being impossible there should be a reasonable creature in *being*, but it will immediately and always be his

duty to love God supremely and above all things; that, you must know, is the most fundamental of all such laws. Therefore when, because original impressions were become so obscure and illegible in our natures, it became necessary there should be a new and more express edition of them in God's written word, this is placed in the very front of them, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." And when our Saviour was to tell which was the first and great commandment, he gives it thus, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."^a The thing enjoined by this law is most substantial, the life and soul of all other duty, and without which all that we can do besides is but mere shadow; for whatsoever we are enjoined to do else, we must understand enjoined to be done out of love to God, as the principle whence it must proceed; and if it proceed not thence, the moral goodness of it vanishes as a beam cut off from the sun. For on this—with the other which is like unto it, and which also hangs upon this,—hang all the law and the prophets. What—durst thou who knowest God, or rather art known by him, neglect so great and substantial a duty? This is not like the command of wearing fringe on the borders of the garment, or of not wearing a garment of linen and woollen,—wherein, surely, they whom it concerned should have been very undutiful to have disobeyed,—but it is the very

^a Mat. xxii. 37.

greatest among the great things of the law, a duty upon which all duty depends even for life and breath. Should not this have obtained in thy practice, to run through and animate all the rest? Was it fit, it should lie dead and bound up in the habitual principle, and not go forth into act and exercise? Didst thou do thy duty herein by being only inclined to do it? Would not the inclination, if it were right, infer suitable exercise? Why was so express a law neglected?—a law so often enjoined in the sacred volume,—the practice of it mentioned with approbation, the neglect of it animadverted upon with abhorrence. How could you turn over the leaves of that book, and not often meet with such words, “Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous;”^a “Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say unto you, rejoice?”^b Should not so frequent inculcations of the same thing have been answered by the frequency and continuedness of your practice of it? Or was it enough, now and then, as it were casually and by chance to hit upon the doing of what is so momentous a part of your religion, and what ought to be the business of your life? Ought it not to cut your heart, to find yourself herein convicted of a disobedient omission? and when the great God exacts that stated homage from you, a frequent practical explicit recognition and owning of him as the supreme delight, the great solace and rest of your souls, that you have been so little

^a Ps. xxxiii. 1.^b Phil. iii. 1. iv. 4.

awed with the apprehension of his authority and right in this case? and that such has been your omission, when He hath mercifully chosen to make that the matter of his command and claim, wherein your own advantage satisfaction and content so entirely consist?—That your practice is herein disagreeable to a law, speaks it sinful; that it transgresses so great a law, highly aggravates your sin;—a law so important, upon which so much depends, so express and plain, legible in the very nature of things, and in reference whereto the very excellency of the object should suffice to dictate to you your duty, even if no command had been otherwise given in the case. Surely the neglect of such a law cannot have been without great transgression.

Your own conscience, you will acknowledge, ought to be a rule to you, when it manifestly agrees with that former rule, the supreme and royal law. Do you not find yourselves herein to have offended against that? It may be your sleeping conscience did not find yourself to offend: but do you not find yourself to have offended it, now beginning to awake? This is not a doubtful and disputable matter; surely, you will not make a scruple of it, a difficult case of conscience, whether you should take the Lord of heaven and earth for your God, whether you should choose Him for your portion, seek rest in Him, and place upon Him your delight and love? If, in so plain a case, your conscience hath not expressed itself offended, you have offended

against it, in letting it sleep so securely, and not stirring it up to its proper office and work. And know, that sinning against the light of one's own conscience doth not consist only in going against the actual deliberated thoughts which we have had, but also in walking contrary to our habitual knowledge, and to the thoughts and apprehensions which thence we might and should actually have had. Inadvertency and disregard of known duty are the most usual way of sinning against conscience. Besides, have you not in this often gone against the repeated checks of your own conscience? Bethink yourselves, have you not in your prayer intermingled frequent confessions of your cold love to God, and that you have taken so little delight in him? Were those only customary forms with you, and words of course? Surely, though it might not be urgently enough, your consciences did at such times accuse you. And let that be a dreadful thing in your eyes, to continue a course which, if you consider, you cannot but condemn.

Ought not your experience to have been instructive to you,—as it commonly is to men in other matters? Have you not, in this neglect, run counter to such instruction? By this means you are supposed to have known the sweetness—as, by that last mentioned, the equity and fitness—of delight in God. Have not those been your best hours, wherein you could freely solace yourselves in Him? Was not one of them better than a thousand otherwise spent? Did you

never find it good for you, in this way, to draw nigh to God;^a and hereupon pronounce them blessed, whom he hath chosen and caused to approach to him?^b And where is that blessedness, of which he spake? Have you forgotten, that you ever thus tasted how gracious the Lord was? It is like, you have by your taste found it also an evil thing and bitter, to depart from him. Methinks you should reckon it a great increase of your sin, to have gone against your own sense, when especially your superior rule might give you assurance, it did not deceive you. And doth it not expressly oblige you to follow its guidance, while it puts the character of perfect (or, of being come to full age)^c upon them, who by age and experience have senses exercised to discern between good and evil?

What will you say to the great obligations, which the love and kindness of God have laid upon you? Will you not esteem yourselves to have been thereby bound to place your love and delight on him? Could you decline doing so, without putting a slight upon the love of Him who is infinite in what he is, and who is love? Was not his love enough to deserve yours—the love of a God, that of a silly worm? Were you not obliged to love him again, who was so much before-hand with you in the matter of love,—to love him who had loved you first?^d The first love is perfectly free; the latter is thereby certainly obliged and become a bounden

^a *Ps. lxxiii. 28.* *Ps. lxxv. 4.* ^c *Heb. v. 14.* ^d *1 John iv.*

duty. How variously, and with how mighty demonstration, hath that love expressed and evidenced itself. It hath not glanced at you, but rested on you, and settled in delight. He hath so stood affected towards the people of his choice, and put a name on them, on purpose to signify his delight in them.^a He rejoices over them with joy, and rests in his love to them.^b The Lord taketh pleasure in his people. His delights have from of old been with the sons of men.^c Could He delight in such as you, and cannot you in Him? Be amazed at this! How mean an object had He for his delight! How glorious and enamouring a one have you! Excellency and love in conjunction! whereas in you were met deformity and ill-will! He hath loved you, so as to remit to you much,—to give to you and for you a great deal more, himself and the son of his delights. He, thou should'st recount, invited thee to delight in Him who hath always sought thy good, done strange things to effect it, takes pleasure in thy prosperity, and exercises loving kindness towards thee with delight;—who contrived thy happiness; wrought out thy peace at the expense of blood, even his own; taught thee the way of life, cared for thee all thy days, hath supplied thy wants, borne thy burthens, eased thy griefs, wiped thy tears. And if now he say to thee, "After all this could'st thou take no pleasure in me," will not that confound and shame thee? He hath

^a *Isa. lxii. 4.*^b *Zeph. iii. 17.*^c *Prov. viii. 31.*

expressed his love by his earnest and successful endeavours to gain thine. How disingenuous, unbecoming, and unsuitable to all this, are thy strangeness and distance afterwards! It is more unworthy to cast out of your hearts, than not to have admitted, such a guest.

How contrary is this omission to what, by solemn vow and stipulation, you have bound yourselves to? It hath graciously pleased the blessed God, in his transactions with men, to contrive his laws into the form of a covenant, wherein upon terms he binds himself to them expecting (what he obtains from such as become his own) their restipulation. Wonderful grace! that he should article with his creatures, and capitulate with the work of his own hands! And whereas his first and great *law*—which virtually, being submitted to, comprehends our obedience to all the rest—is, as hath been noted, “Thou shalt have no other Gods before me,” this also he gives forth often as the sum and abridgment of his *covenant*, “That he will be our God, and we shall be his people.” Now this you have consented to, and therein bound yourselves—as, you have heard, our Saviour expounds the first and great commandment—“to love him with all your soul.” How does your neglect to delight in him agree with this? What—love Him with all your soul, in whom you can rarely find yourselves to take any pleasure! Surely, your hearts will now misgive and admit a conviction, you have not dealt truly, not kindly, in this. What—not keep faith with the righteous God! To deceive

a deceiver, some would think not intolerable. But what pretence can there be for such dealing with the God of truth? You have vowed to him, —what think you of this drawing back, this trifling with Him, the great and terrible God, who keeps covenant and mercy for ever! How unbecoming is it, to dally with him as you would with an uncertain whiffling man! To be off and on—to say and unsay, that he shall be your God, and that he shall not, (for how is he your God, if you delight not in him,) imports little of that solemn gravity and staidness, which become a transaction with the Most High God. He takes no pleasure in fools;—wherefore pay that which you have vowed. ^a

Nor doth this omission better agree with your relation to Him, which arises from your covenant. Thence He becomes yours, and you his; “I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine;”—and the covenant being binding on both parts, the relation is mutual, so that thereby also He becomes yours. It is a most near relation, represented by the nearest among men, even the conjugal relation. Therefore how full is that song of songs of expressions importing mutual delights suitable thereto! And what a bondage, as well as incongruity, were that relation without delight!—Have you repented your choice? If not, why take you not pleasure? Why do you not rejoice and glory in it, even as he professes to do over you? If he should repent, in what case were

^a Eccl. vii. 4.

you? Not to take pleasure in God! Your own God! How strangely uncouth is it. You are not to consider him as a stranger, an unrelated one. You are to reckon and say of him, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend," &c. "I am his and he is mine." How ill do such words become the mouth, that utters them not from the abundance of the heart, from a heart abounding and overflowing with love and joy!

And how do the temper of your heart and your practice, while you take not actual ordinary delight in God, clash and jar with your profession. For, admit you do not make an express verbal profession of actual delight in God, at such times when you find it not, yet you still avow yourselves, and would be accounted and looked upon, as related to him: and the just challenges of that relation are not any way answered, but by a course of ordinary actual delight. So much your profession manifestly imports. Whilst you profess the Lord to be your God, you profess him to be your supreme delight. And how is he so, when you seldom have a delightful thought of him, or look to him with any pleasure,—when the temper of your spirit towards him is usually strange and shy? What is there at the bottom, and under the cover of your yet continued profession, but falsehood? A correspondent affection there is not. Is not your very profession, then, mere dissimulation and a lie, a concealment and disguise of a heart inwardly bad?

What good principle can you have in you toward God, if you have not love to him? And the

property of that is to work towards him by desire, that it may rest in him by delight. Have you faith in God? That works by this love. Faith is that great power in the holy soul, by which it acts from God as a principle; love is that by which it acts towards him as an end: by that, the soul draws from him; by this, it moves to him, and rests in him. The same holy gracious nature (dependent on its great author and cause) inclines it both to this motion and this rest. Thus, by the work of the new creature in the soul, formed purposely for blessedness in God and for devotedness to him, its aspirations, its motions, its very pulse and breath, tend and beat this way.—But you apply not your souls to delight in God. You bend your minds and hearts another way. What are you doing then? You are striving against your own life; you are mortifying all good inclinations towards God, stifling and stopping the breath that your panting heart would send forth to him; you are busily crucifying the new creature, instead of the body of sin. There is somewhat in you that would work towards God, and you suffer it not; is that well? That divine thing, born of God, of heavenly descent, that hath so much in it of sacredness by its extraction and parentage,—you fear not to do it violence!

It is an offence against the Spirit of grace, whose dictates are herein slighted and opposed. For, surely, with the tendencies of the new creature He concurs; it is maintained by him as well *as produced*, and continually depends on him as *to its being*, properties, and all its operations.

Nothing therefore can be contrary to the inclination of a renewed soul, as such, which is not more so to the Holy Ghost himself. The disposing of the soul to delight is most expressly ascribed to him ; that very disposition being itself joy in the Holy Ghost : ^a and we find it numbered among the fruits of the spirit. ^b You may possibly be less apprehensive of your sin in this, because you find him not dictating to you with that discernible majesty, authority, and glory, that you may think agreeable to so great an Agent. But you must know, he applies himself to us in a way much imitating that of nature. And as in reference to the conservation of our natural beings, we are assured the First Cause co-operates with inferior causes, (for we live, move, and have our being in him,) though the divine influence is not communicated to this purpose with any sensible glory, or so distinguishably that we can discern what influence is from the superior cause and what from the subordinate ; so it is here also,—the Divine Spirit accommodates himself very much to the same way of working with our natures, and acts as suitably to our natures. Though by sensible tokens we cannot always tell, which are the motions that proceed from him ; yet faith teaches us from his word, to ascribe to him whatever spiritual good we find in ourselves, inasmuch as we are not of ourselves sufficient to think a good thought. And if by that word we judge of the various motions that stir in us, we may discern which are good and

^a Rom. xiv. 7.

^b Gal. v. 22.

which not ; and so may know what to ascribe to the Spirit, and what not. Whereas therefore that word commands us to delight in God,—if we find any motion in our hearts tending that way, we are presently to own the finger of God, and the touch of his Holy Spirit therein. And have you found no such motions excited, no thoughts that have had this aspect and tendency, which indulged carnality and aversion have repressed and counter-wrought ? Herein you have grieved and quenched the Spirit. You must consider him as a free agent, who works to will and to do of his good pleasure. His influence is retractable, and, when it is retracted, you ought in this case to reckon, it signifies a resentment of your undutiful and regardless carriage towards him. You have striven against the Spirit of the most high God ; you have resisted him in the execution of his office, when you were committed to his conduct and government ; you have fallen out and quarrelled with your merciful guide, and slighted at once both his authority, and love : this could be no small offence. You are also to consider, that when such a province was assigned him in reference to you, and the great God set his spirit on work about you, it was with a special end and design, being the determination of most wise counsel.

How highly doth this increase the offence, that you have herein directly obstructed the course and progress of that design, that could be no *other than the magnifying of his grace in your conduct to blessedness.* This is that whereon he

hath been intent; and he hath made his design herein so visible, that they that run might read what it was. The very overture to you, of placing your delight on him, speaks its end; it is that, whereby *He* should be most highly acknowledged, and *you* blessed, both at once. His known design, you ought to have reckoned, prescribed to you a law. It is a part of civility towards even an ordinary man, not to cross his design, which I know him earnestly to intend, when it tends no way to my prejudice, or any man's; to do so would, in common interpretation, argue ill nature and a mischievous disposition. Much more would duty and just observance towards a superior challenge so much as not to counter-work him, and awe a well tempered spirit into subjection and compliance. But a stiff reluctancy to the great and known design of the blessed God, meant so directly to our own advantage, speaks so very bad a temper, hath in it such a complication of peevish wilfulness, of undutifulness and ingratitude to him, of negligence and disregard of ourselves, that it must want a name to express it.

Do you now see, what evil the neglect of delighting in God—accompanied, as it cannot but be, with the having your hearts otherwise engaged and vainly busy—includes and carries in it? Will you pause awhile, and deliberate upon it? Do but make your just and sober estimate, by the things that have been mentioned. Measure it.

by God's law,—it imports manifest disobedience in a matter of highest consequence ; by the judgment of your own conscience,—it imports much boldness against light in a very plain case ; by your experience,—it speaks unteachable stupidity, or a very heedless forgetful spirit ; measure it by the obligation laid, upon you, by the kindness of this very counsel and offer—it hath in it great ingratitude and insensibility to the greatest love ; by your covenant,—it imports treachery ; by your profession,—it imports falsehood and hypocrisy ; by the tendency of the new nature in you,—unnatural violence ; by the dictates of God's spirit,—great untractableness ; by his known declared design in this matter,—a most undutiful disrespect to him, with a most wretched carelessness of yourselves as to your nearest and most important concerns.

One would think it needless to say more ; but why should we baulk any thing that so obviously occurs, tending to set forth the exceeding great sinfulness of this sin ? Therefore know, that, besides its great faultiness in itself, much also cannot but be derived into it from its very faulty causes. It supposes and argues great evils that flow into it, and from which it hath its rise.

It argues great blindness and ignorance of God. For is it possible any should have known, and not have loved him ? or should have beheld his glory, and not have been delighted therewith ?

Can your ignorance of God be excusable or innocent ? The apostle's words are too applicable ;

“Some have not the knowledge of God, I speak it to your shame.”^a Do you pretend to him, and know him not,—worship-him so oft, and worship you know not what? Have you had such opportunity of knowing him, and yet are ignorant? At least, it might be thought, that in Judah is God known, and his name is great in Israel, where he hath had his tabernacle and dwelling place.^b Here, one would think, his altar should not bear the same inscription as at Athens, “To the unknown God.”^c How express hath his discovery of himself been to you, and how amiable! What was there in it not delectable, or in respect whereof he hath not appeared altogether lovely, and, as it were, composed of delights? You have had opportunity to behold Him clad with the garments of salvation and praise, and as He is in Christ,—in that alluring posture, his reconciling the world to himself,^d wherein all attributes have visibly conspired* with the reconciling design,—his boundless fulness of life and love not obstructed, but flowing out in rich and liberal communications. If you had not excluded that glorious pleasant light, wherein he is so to be beheld, you would have beheld what had won your hearts fully, and bound them to him in everlasting delight and love. And have you not reason to be ashamed, that you have not known him better and to better purpose? Alienation from the life of God^e proceeds from blindness of heart, from a voluntary blindness.

^a 1 Cor. xv. 34.^b Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2.^c Acts xvii. 23.^d 2 Cor. v. 18.^e Eph. iv. 18.

If your knowledge of him be not little, your little delight in him argues much unmindfulness of him, at least that you have not minded him duly, and according to what you have known. It might here be seasonable to suggest to you, how likely it is, that in several ways your great faultiness in the matter of thinking of God may have contributed to the withholding from him of your delight. Consider therefore, have not your thoughts of him been slight and transient? Have they not been superficial thoughts, casual only, and such as have dropped into your minds as it were by chance, fluid and roving, fixed neither upon him nor into your hearts, and too much resembling what is said of the wicked man, "God is not in all his thoughts."^a Your thoughts have not united upon him; he hath not been centered in them. Was not this the case? You bestowed upon him it may be, now and then, a hasty passant glance, the careless cast of a wandering eye; and was this likely to beget an abiding permanent delight? Have you been wont to compose yourselves, designedly and on purpose to think of him, so as your thoughts might be said to have been directed towards him by the desire and inclining bent of your heart, according to that, "The desire of our soul is towards thy name, and to the remembrance of Thee?"^b Whence it is, that it is represented as the usual posture of them whom he reckons among his jewels, and for whom the book of remembrance

^a Ps. x. 4.^b Isa. xxvi. 8.

was written, "They thought on his name;"^a a thing, that they might be known by and distinguished from other men; (wherefore it is observable, that their remembrance of him was thought worth the remembering, and to be transmitted into records, never to be forgotten.) The evil of your not delighting in God hath a great accession from your negligent thinking of him.

Have not your thoughts of him been low and mean, such as have imported light esteem? Compare them with those admiring thoughts, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods! Who is like thee, glorious in holiness!"^b "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"^c How unlike have yours been to such thoughts? Bethink yourselves, how deeply culpable you have made your neglect to delight in God, by your unworthy thoughts, by which you have detracted so unspeakably from the divine excellency, rendering him such to yourselves, as if he were not worthy to be delighted in. How ought this to shake your hearts!

Have they not been hard thoughts, full of censure, and misjudging of his nature, counsels, ways and works? Have there not been perverse reasonings, with dislike of his methods of government over men in this present state,—as if he had too little kindness for such as you would have him favour, and too much for others,—judging his love and hatred by false measures? This seems to be the evil, to which the injunc-

^a *Mal. iii. 16.*

^b *Deut. xxxii. 15.*

^c *Ps. viii. 1.*

tion of delight in God is opposed in this Psalm ; and whence it may be estimated, how directly that militates against this, and prevailing excludes it. Perhaps you have delighted so little in God, because you have thought the thing that is so wearisome to him, “ Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them ;” ^a and have said in your hearts, “ Where is the God of judgment ?”

Have you not been more peccant in your apprehensions of his rules for the disposing of men as to their eternal states ? Have you not disbelieved the revelation which he hath given of his nature, and the express declarations of his mind and purpose touching these matters ? Was it not enough for you to have known his gracious disposition towards returning sinners, who desire him again for their God, and willingly accept the grace, and submit themselves to the government of his Son ? Should not this have allured and won your hearts to him, and made you, with humble thankful admiration of his grace, resign and yield yourselves to be His for ever ? Have you not measured your apprehension of him, by the suggestions and misgivings of your guilty jealous hearts, or by your experienced animosity and the implacableness of your own spirits towards such as have offended you,—as if He could forgive no more than you are disposed to do ? Have you not opposed your own imaginations of Him to his express testification of himself, that He is Love, slow to anger

^a Mal. ii. 17.

and of great mercy ; and that as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above your ways, and his thoughts above your thoughts ? Have you not, against his plain word, thought him irreconcilable, and averse to the accepting of any atonement for you ? prescribed and set bounds to him, and thought your sin greater than could be forgiven ? And if hereupon you have not delighted in him, and have found all ingenuous affection towards him stifled within you, this injurious cause, denying the infinite goodness of his nature, and giving the lie to his word, hath made the sin, of not delighting in him, beyond all expression worse.

Further consider,—Have not your thoughts of God been few ? Is not the meditation of him with you an unwonted thing ? The Psalmist, resolving to mind him much, to praise and sing to him as long as he lived, and while he had any being,^a doth, as it were, prophecy to himself, that his meditation of him should be sweet. Frequent right thoughts of God will surely be pleasant delightful thoughts : but your little delight in God too plainly argues, you have minded him but seldom. And how full of guilt is your not delighting in God, upon this account ? How cheap is the expense of a thought ? What—that so much should not be done, in order to the delightful rest of your soul in God !

The sin of not delighting in God supposes much carnality, and an inclination to this earth and the things of it, and thereupon argues in you a very mean abject spirit. While

^a Ps. civ. 33.

you can take no pleasure, or take so little, in God, is there nothing else wherein you take pleasure? And what is it? God hath in this matter no other rival than this world. It is its friendship, that is enmity to him ;^a something or other of it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life prevails, while the love of the Father hath so little place in you. Whither are you sunk? into how low and vile a temper of spirit, when you can take pleasure in such base things rather than in the blessed God, and quit so high and pure delights for mire and dirt? What has thus carnalized your minds, that you savour only the things of the flesh, and divine things are tasteless and without relish?

Nor are you to think more favourably of your case, if you take little actual complacency in the world also. Probably it is, because you have little of it to delight in ; it may be, you are more acquainted with it's cares than it's delights, or your desire after it is much larger than your possession. It is all one for that. But what are your hearts most apt to delight in? or, what is most agreeable to your temper? It is the same thing, what earthly affection predominates in you, while the temper of your spirit is earthly, and thereby held off from God. Your not having actual earthly delights to put in the balance against heavenly, is only by accident. But all your cares, desires and hopes of that vile kind, would turn into as vile delights, if you had your

^a James iv. 4.

wills. In the mean time, you are the more excuseless, and your sin is the grosser, when even the cares and troubles of this world are of more value with you than delight in God. How far are you from that temper, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and whom do I desire on earth beside Thee?”^a

How sad an argument is it, of downright aversion and disaffectedness to God yet remaining! Whence can your not delighting in him proceed, but from this as its most immediate cause? What could hinder you, if your heart were inclined? Are you not astonished to behold this as the state of your case, that you delight not in him, because your heart is against it, that is, from flat enmity? What doth more naturally import enmity to any thing, than to turn off from it, as not being able to take pleasure in it? So God expresses his detestation of Apostates, “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”^b Do you not tremble to think, that such should be the temper of your spirit towards God, and such your estimate of him,—as if he were a despised broken idol?^c Reckon then thus with yourself; as your case stands, and as things lie between God and you, your little delight in God can have no more favourable account given of it, nor be resolved into any gentler or milder cause, than enmity. By what worse name can we call any thing, than enmity to God? But we speak of your habitual temper, as

^a Psal. lxxiii. 25.

^b Heb. x. 38.

^c Jer. xxii. 38.

that which is the cause of your actual neglect : and since you have a discovery of God as the most delectable object, and cannot pretend there is a better, and have free permission to place your delight on him, and are earnestly invited and pressed to it, it is plain, nothing else is in your way to hinder you : you delight not in him, because your heart only is averse.

We might insist further, to shew the evils that ensue upon this neglect : such I mean as do not follow casually and by accident, but which have a very inward connexion with it, and are its most natural consequences ; being some way caused by it, or which it directly tends to beget. And, yet, these we need not be solicitously curious to distinguish, as things of a kind altogether diverse from those last mentioned under the foregoing head. For it is very apparent, the same things may both cause little delight in God, and be caused thereby ; as a person may not delight in God because he knows him not, and may be the less apt to entertain the knowledge of him because he hath no delight in him. It aggravates the evil of not taking frequent actual delight in God, that hereby sin grows—whether in the same or in different kinds ; there is still an increase of sin, though but of the same sort that was before.

You ought to consider then : As you take so little delight in God from that very bad cause, that you have not entertained the right knowledge of him, when you had so great opportunity

to get much of it,—do you not also find, that by your withholding yourselves from delighting in him, you have still less disposition to seek his more inward acquaintance? And doth not that make your matter much worse? If you already know somewhat of him, you yet know but in part; your object is infinite, and this knowledge so excellent, that you cannot fully attain to it; there is still more to be known.

Now, therefore, if you did delight much in God, would you not be pressing hard after him?^a would you not be following on to know him?^b Then would his goings forth be prepared before you as the morning, and he would be still visiting you with fresh and increasing light; your pleasure would be renewed and increased by every fresh view, and consequently your progress would be from sight to sight, and from pleasure to pleasure; whereas now this wheel stands still, or you are going back into darkness and desolation. Have you not much the more to answer for, upon this account?

The like may be said as to the great faultiness of your thoughts of God. Though that contributes not a little to your not delighting in him, yet, if you did delight in him more, would not your thoughts of him be more deeply serious, more highly raised? Would you not be very unapt to take up injurious hard thoughts of him? Would not his thoughts—once become precious to you—be also numerous, or innumerable rather,

^a Psal. lxxiii. 8.

^b Hosea vi. 3.

as the sands of the sea-shore? Would not your earthly temper, your strangeness and averseness to him, vanish and wear off, if you were more exercised in actual delightful converse with him? Therefore the permanency and increase of those mentioned evils, and that they have got such settled rooting in you, is all to be charged upon your not applying yourselves to more frequent actual delight in God.

Consider also, what further may follow here-upon, namely, the languishment and decays of your inward man—the difficulty you find to trust in God, when you are reduced to straits, (for who would commit his concerns to one he does not love?)—your impatience of adverse and cross emergencies, that may often befall you—your aptness to vexation or despondency—the easy victory a temptation hath over you, (as, surely, he who delights in God is sooner drawn away from God, or into sin against him,)—your less usefulness in your place and station—your want of courage, resolution, and zeal for God, (which are best maintained by delight and the relishes of a sweet complacency taken in him,)—your sluggishness in a course of well doing—the sense of a toilsome heavy labour in religion, that it begets weariness without rest,—and lastly, your continual bondage by the fear of death, (which one would not dread, apprehending it only a removal into the presence of Him in whom one delights)—all these things (which might have been distinctly insisted on, and more *expressly* accommodated to the present purpose,

but that I would not be over tedious, and that somewhere else some or other of them may fall again in our way,) bring in great and weighty additions to the evil and guiltiness of this sin, and much tend to fill up its measure, even to pressing down and running over. For how just is it, to impute to it what it naturally causes, and lay its own impure and viperous births at its own door !

Though this discourse hath been drawn out to a greater length than was intended, it will not be lost labour, if, by all that has been said, any that fear God shall be brought to apprehend more of the odiousness of this sin, and if the self-indulgent thought be banished far from them, that this is either an indifferent matter, or one of their more harmless inadvertencies and omissions. And as it is to be hoped, that the apprehension of the evil of this neglect will prompt and quicken serious and considerate persons to set upon the enjoined duty, it will be the less necessary to enlarge much in that other kind of discourse, which we now come to, namely, the invitation to this duty.

CHAPTER V.

Invitation to the Duty of delighting in God.

THE invitation to the exercise of this duty ought, if it were possible, to be a kind of manuduction ; it is needful we be not only called and pressed, but even led into it. This then we are to endeavour, the giving of some plain prescriptions, that may put us into an easy and direct way of falling expeditely upon this delightful work.

Here it must be considered, that all, as hath been said, are not in an equal disposition to it ; some are more averse, others less, but all too much. Therefore are we to begin as low as their case may require, who are less disposed ; and so proceeding on in our course, somewhat may fall in more suitable to them who are in some disposition to it, but do yet need—as who do not?—some help and furtherance.

First, therefore, it is necessary, that you deliberately and resolvedly design the thing itself. Propose to yourselves delighting in God as a business, to which you will designedly and with stedfast purpose apply your whole soul. Content not yourselves with light roving thoughts about it, which many have about divers matters, *which they never think fit to engage themselves*

in. Determine the matter fully in your own heart, and say, "Many projects I have tried in my time, sundry things I have turned my mind unto, to little purpose; I will now see, what there is of delight to be found in God." The sloth and aversion of a backward heart must be overcome by resolution; and that resolution well weighed, deliberately taken up, and deeply fixed, that it may last and overcome. And why should you not be resolved on this point? Is this a matter always to be waved? Know you another way to be happy? Are you yet to learn, that a reasonable soul needs the fulness of God to make it happy, and that there is no other God but one? Can there be any dispute or doubt in the case, when there is but one thing to be done, besides yielding one's self to be miserable for ever? And what need of that, while yet there is one way to avoid it? Surely, that there is but one, is better than if there were a thousand. You need not now be long in choosing.

To talk of any difficulty in the matter, is a strange impertinency; for who would oppose difficulty to necessity, or allege the thing is hard, which must be done? must it be done, and never be attempted; or attempted, and not be resolved upon? You have nothing to do to read further, who will not digest this first counsel, and here settle your resolution, "I will apply myself to a course of delight in God." If ever you will be in earnest, you must return to this point; you will but waste time to no purpose, if you will not now set down *your resolution*; that is, that you will seek a

happiness for your soul,—too long already neglected!—a happiness that may satisfy and last, and (where only it is to be found) in the blessed God, by setting yourselves to delight in him;—since nothing can make you happy, wherein you delight not.

Then next consider your present state toward God,—do you see you must come to this point, of having your delight in God? In what posture then are your affairs towards Him? How do things stand between Him and you? You well know you were unacceptable to him, and his enemy; and that his justice and holy nature obliged him to hold you as such, though he never gave you ground to think him implacable. Can you delight in an enemy, who—as matters in that case stand—must be feared as ready to avenge himself on you, and as having whet his glittering sword, and made the arrow ready upon the string, directed against your very heart? Apprehend this to have been your case, and most deservedly, that you were an impure hateful wretch, deformed and loathsome, one that could yield the holy God no matter of delight, full of enmity and contrariety to him, and in whom he could not but find much cause of most just hatred. Remember, you were one of his revolted creatures, under his most deserved wrath and curse. Know at how vast a distance you were from delighting in him, and from a state that could admit of it. Consider, is this still your case? Do not rashly think it altered; or that you have nothing to do, but out of hand to rush upon the business of *delighting in God*.

Yet do not think it unalterable. Do not conclude it as a determined and undoubted thing, that matters can never be taken up between God and you, or that you can never become suitable and acceptable to Him. Look not upon your wicked heart as unalterably wicked, nor upon him as an irreconcilable enemy. Account, that he waits for your turning to him, as being inclined to friendship with you;—otherwise, would vengeance have suffered you so long to live? have you not been long at his mercy? hath he not spared you, when it was in his power to crush you at pleasure? Do not think therefore—what you have no pretence for thinking—that he has a destructive design upon you, and will accept of no atonement.

Acquaint yourself with the way and terms, upon which his Gospel declares him reconcilable; that is, that he will never be reconciled to you, while you remain wicked,—nor for your own sake, become you never so good; that a more costly sacrifice, than you can either procure or be, must expiate your guilt, and make your peace. If this matter could have been effected in a less expensive way, the Son of God had not been (as you know he was) designed himself and made that sacrifice; nor would a work have been undertaken by Him, that might as well have been done by common hands. And, since He submitted and undertook as he did, reckon with yourself, how highly just it is, that the entire honour of so merciful a condescension and so great a performance be wholly ascribed to him. But withal

know, he shed his blood, not in kindness to your sin, but to you; and that his design was at once to procure the death of that, and your life; that you need his Spirit as well as his Blood; that as you ever expect to experience and taste the delights of that communion whereinto he calls you, you must not only have the blood of Christ to cleanse you from all sin, but must also walk in the light as he is in the light;^a that an entire resignation, a trusting and subjecting of yourself to the mercy and governing power of the Redeemer, are necessary to the setting of things right between God and you; that in Him only you may both accept God and be accepted by him; that He must be the centre of union between God and you, and that union the ground of all delightful intercourse.

Make request to God, that he would draw you into that union with his Son, to whom none can come, but those who are drawn by himself.^b Do not dream and slumber in this business; but know, your all depends on it. Consider the exigency of your case. Do you find your heart sluggish, and indisposed to any such transaction with God and Christ? does it decline and draw back? Know, herein it acts but its own nature, and does as it is. Therefore stir up yourself, to take hold of his strength,^c—in which way, if you have mind to be at peace, you shall make peace. Cry to him earnestly, “Draw a poor wretch out of darkness and death, that must otherwise be at eternal distance from thee, and miserable for

^a 1 John i. 7.

^b John vi. 65.

^c Isaiah xxvii. 5.

ever. Join me to Him who will bring me to Thee, and make me one for ever with Thee."

Accepting Jesus Christ as thy Saviour and thy Lord, accept in him—with all humble reverence, thankfulness and admiration of divine mercy and goodness—the blessed God to be thy God; surrendering and yielding up thyself entirely and fully to be his for ever. Do this unfeignedly, and with great solemnity; and let it be to thee for an everlasting memorial. Record it as a memorable day, wherein thou didst go out of thyself and all finite narrow good, and pass into union with the eternal, immense, incomprehensible and all-comprehending Good, and enter upon it as thine own. Apprehend—and bless God that this is the state of the case—that, in this way, He offers himself most freely to thee. It were astonishing to think of purchasing so great a good;—the matter were not to be offered at. But how transporting is it, that nothing but acceptance and resignation should be needful, to make thee one with the great God, and make his fulness thine! Therefore make haste to do this, and be not hasty in doing it. Defer not, but do it with great seriousness, deliberation, and fulness of consent; considering, you are about to enter into an everlasting covenant not to be forgotten, and doing a thing never to be again undone.

Now, if herein your heart be sincere, and there be a real and vital exercise of your very soul in this transaction with God in Christ,—so as that you truly take him for your God, preferring him in your estimation and choice above all things,

and giving up yourself to him as his absolutely and without reservation, to be governed and disposed of by him in all things at his pleasure,—you are hereby brought into that state, that doth admit of delighting in him. And what remains to be said, will concern you as persons in a nearer capacity, and who have a kind of essential aptitude and disposedness of heart to this spiritual work, and will therefore be directed to you, considered according to that supposition.

Only it is withal to be considered in the case of many such, that they arrived hither long ago, and have been somewhat exercised and versed in this piece of holy practice, and have had many pleasant turns with God, and tasted often the delights of his converse; but have discontinued their course, and are grown strange to Him who was their delight, have suffered themselves by insensible degrees to be drawn and tempted away from him; or there hath been some grosser and more violent rupture, by which they have broken themselves off. It will be requisite to say to these somewhat more peculiar, for the reducing of them again to this point of union; after which, what shall ensue, may in common concern them and all that are arrived so far together.

For such therefore whose case this is, it will surely both become and concern you to take this course:—Make a stand, and bethink yourselves; can you justify your carriage towards Him whom you have taken to be your God? can you approve your own way? was this all that you obliged *yourselves* to, in the day of your solemn

treaty with him,—only to take on you the name of a relation to him, and so—excepting that you would now and then compliment him, in some piece of external heartless homage,—take leave, until you meet him again in another world? and that, in the mean time, this present world or your carnal self should really be your god, and He only bear the name? Was this indeed your meaning,—or, if it was, did you deal sincerely in that treaty? Can you think it was his meaning, and that he would expect no more from you? Can you allow yourselves so to interpret his covenant, and give this as the summary account of the tenor of it? How would you, then, expound it to nothing, and make a mere trifle of it, and make your religion a fitter service for an inanimate senseless idol, than for the living and true God? Do you not yet know, what the Name of God imports? Can he be a God to you, who is not acknowledged by you as your very best, the universal, and absolutely all-comprehending Good?

But if you apprehend there was really more in the matter, and that you have been altogether faulty in this thing, then represent to yourselves, as fully as you can, the greatness of the fault. What, have you made God an unnecessary thing to you, while the creature, your very idols, lying vanities, were thought necessary? And these were the things upon which you thought fit to set your hearts, “Which you have loved, which you have served, after which you have walked, which you sought, and whom you have worshipped!”^a

^a Jer. viii. 2.

Think how monstrous this is. Revolve in your own minds the several aggravations of your sinful neglect before mentioned, and labour to feel the weight of them upon your own spirits. Think, what time you have lost from pleasant delightful walking with God! what damage you have done yourselves! how far you might have attained! how much you are cast behind in your preparations for a blessed eternity! what wrong you have done Him, whom you took for the God of your life, to whom you vowed your hearts and souls! how little kindly and truly you have dealt with him!

Return to him with weeping and supplication. Open yourselves freely to him. Let him hear you bemoaning yourselves; pour out your souls to him, in large acknowledgments and confessions of your guiltiness,—which, while you keep silence, will consume your bones and waste you to nothing. Remember whence you are fallen, and repent and do your first works.^a Till then, He hath this against you, that you have left your first love. Consider, is it not a grievous thing to you? Does it not pain your hearts, that your Lord and Redeemer should have somewhat against you, as it were laid up, noted, put on record, and, as himself remarkably expresses it, sealed up among his treasures.^b Is this a small thing with you, when that must be apprehended to be his sense, “I remember the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals:”^c and now, since

^a *Rev. ii. 5.*

^b *Deut. xxxii. 34.*

^c *Jer. ii. 2.*

those former days, what iniquity hast thou found in me, that thou art gone far from me, and hast walked after vanity, and art become vain?" How confounding a thing were it, if he should say, "O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me."^a How becoming is it, and suitable to the case, to cast down a wounded bleeding heart before the Lord, and be abased in the dust at the foot-stool of his mercy-seat!

Though your sins be great and heinous, yet apprehend you are before a mercy-seat; there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared. How would this apprehension promote the humiliation which the case requires! A sullen despondency, that excludes hope of mercy, hardens the heart, and continues the sinful comfortless distance: therefore, apply yourselves to him; seek his pardon in the blood of the Redeemer; know you need it, and that it is only upon such terms to be obtained. When you come with serious unfeigned acknowledgments of your offensive neglect of him, to seek forgiveness at his hand, he will be easy to forgive. How should this melt you down before him! and this is what his own word obliges you to apprehend and believe of him. These words he hath required to be proclaimed to you;^b "Return you backsliding ones, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.

^a Mic. vi. 3.

^b Jer. iii. 12.

Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God." What heart should not break and bleed at this overture? You can be recovered to no capacity of delighting in God, as heretofore, till you sensibly feel the need of great forgiveness, and have a disposition of heart inwardly to relish the sweetness and pleasantness of it; till those words agree with the sense of your hearts, and you can, as in a transport, cry out, "O the blessedness of the man whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered!"^a And now, when you are come thus far, if the temper of your spirit be right in this, there will be, in conjunction with the desire, the hope and value of forgiveness, at least an equal dread of such future strangeness and breaches between God and you.

Most earnestly seek and crave a better and more fixed temper of spirit, more fully determined and bent toward God; that your heart may be directed into the love of God;^b that the spirit of love, power, and a sound mind may bear rule in you. Be intent upon the recovery of that healthy soundness which, wheresoever it hath place, will with a certain steady power, and a strong inclining bent of love, carry your heart toward God. And take heed lest you be satisfied in the expectation and hope of forgiveness, as to your former neglects of God, without this.

There is a manifest prejudice daily accruing to the christian name and profession, by the un-

^a Psal. xxxii. 1,

^b 2 Thess. iii. 5.

equal estimation which that part of the doctrine of Christ, which concerns the work of his spirit upon us (regeneration, the new creature, repentance, and a holy life,) hath in comparison of that which concerns his performances and acquisitions for us (expiation of sin, satisfaction of divine justice, forgiveness and acceptance with God.) How sweet ravishing transporting doctrines, and how pure Gospel are these latter accounted by many, who esteem the former cold, sapless, unpleasant notions ! Thence comes christian religion to look with so distorted a face, that it is hardly to be known ; being made to seem, as if it imported only a design to save some persons from divine wrath and justice, without ever giving them that disposition of heart, which is necessary both to their serving of God and their blessedness in him. This is not to be imputed so much to the misrepresentation made of it by them whose business it hath been to instruct others,—though of them too many may have been very faulty in almost suppressing, or insisting little upon doctrines of the former strain, while the stream of their discourses hath mostly run upon the other ; for it must be acknowledged that, by very many in our age, the absolute necessity of the great heart-change has been most clearly represented, and as urgently pressed as perhaps in most ages that have gone before. But the matter is plainly to be most attributed to that depravedness of man's nature, whence there is a most unequal and partial reception of the *truth of God* ; and that which, taken apart by

itself, seems to import more of indulgence to sinners, is readily caught at; but that, which more directly strikes at the very root of the sin, is let pass, as if it had never been spoken. And, so, men make up to themselves a Gospel of this tenor and import, that—let the temper of their spirits towards God be what it will—if they rely and rest upon the righteousness of Christ, God will be reconciled to them; and they think, they need take no further care: but whatever is said in the gospel of Christ, of the necessity of being born of God, of partaking a divine nature, of putting off the old man, and putting on the new, &c. is looked upon, as if it had been thrown in by chance, and signified nothing; and the other, without this, is thought to be pure Gospel, as if these doctrines were impertinent additions and falsifications. Will not such men understand, that the detracting of any thing from the instrument or testament of a man, as well as adding thereto, makes it another thing, and none of his act or deed; and so, that their pure gospel, as they call it, is another Gospel, nay—because there cannot be another—no gospel? Will they not understand, how simply impossible it is, in the very nature of the thing, that the end should be attained, of bringing men to blessedness, *i. e.* to a delightful rest in God, without their having a new nature, a heart inclined and bent toward God, and wrought to a conformity and agreement with God's holy nature and will, to which the offer of hope and forgiveness by the blood of *Christ* is designed to win and form them? For

can men be happy in Him, in whom they take no delight? or delight in Him, to whom the very temper of their spirits is habitually unsuitable and repugnant? How plain are things to them, who are resolved not to see!

Wherefore, beware of contenting yourselves with the mere hope, that, upon your having admitted a conviction, and felt some regret in your spirits for former strangeness to God, you shall be pardoned; while yet you design not to redress, but to run on the same course as before, and, when you have hereby contracted a new score, and the load of your guilt begins to be sensibly heavy upon you, then to betake yourselves to God for a new pardon. What presumptuous trifling is this with the Lord of Heaven and Earth! And what do you mean by it, or seem to expect? Is it not, that God should, instead of remitting your sin to you, remit your duty, cancel the obligation of that very supreme universal fundamental law of nature itself, and excuse you from loving him, delighting in him, or setting your heart upon him? Think not, then, forgiveness alone will serve your turn; it will signify as much as a pardon will do to a malefactor just ready to die of a mortal disease. He, poor man, as much needs a skilful physician, as a merciful prince; and so do you. Your case is nothing the worse, that the person of each is sustained by the same Jesus, and that both parts can be performed by the same hand. And know, that a restored rectitude of spirit toward God, a renewed healthiness and sound-

ness of heart, with your actual delighting in God thereupon in your future course, stand in nearer and more immediate connexion with your final perfect delightful rest and blessedness in Him, than your being perpetually forgiven the not doing of it, if this were supposed possible without that: but it is not indeed supposable,—for if God would not therefore hereafter banish you his presence, as now he does not, you would for ever banish yourselves, as now you do.

Let there be a solemn recognition and renewal of your engagement and devoting of yourself to God. Again take hold of his covenant, and see that it take faster hold of you. Do it as if you had never done it, as if you were now to begin with him;—only that your own sin and his grace ought now to appear greater in your eyes,—that more odious, because you have added treachery to disaffection,—this more glorious and admirable, because he hath yet left open to you a door of hope, there is still a place for repentance, and he is ready to treat with you again on a new score. With what humility, shame, fear and trembling, distrust of yourself, resolution of future more diligent circumspection and observation of your own spirit, trust and dependence on his spirit, ought this transaction now to be managed with the holy God!

CHAPTER VI.

Directions how to improve in the Exercise of delighting in God.

WHEN you are thus returned into the way and course of your duty, then what follows may concern you in common with all others, who, being entered, desire direction, how to proceed and improve in this holy exercise of delighting in God.

Because, therefore, such as have been practised in this course, and, being convinced of the equity and excellency of it, desire to make progress therein, yet find a difficulty in it, somewhat is intended to be said, that possibly may, through the Lord's blessing, be of some use, as to that too common case.

First, then, let it be your great study and endeavour to get a temper of mind actually, ordinarily, and more entirely spiritual. We suppose the implantation of some holy and spiritual principles in you already; but that is not enough. For as a mind, wholly carnal, only savours the things of the flesh, and will perpetually withdraw and recoil, if you offer it any thing tending toward God; so, in whatsoever degree it is carnal, it will do thus in a proportionable degree. If you say, "Let me now apply myself to some delightful intercourse with God," while an earthly tincture

is fresh with you, and it was some carnal thing that made the last impression upon your spirit,—many excuses will be found out, there will be manifold diversions, it will never be thought seasonable ; many other things will be judged necessary to be minded first.

Wherefore, fence against the addictedness of your hearts to those other things. And whereas, through the great advantages that sensible things have upon your senses and imagination, you are in continual danger to be over-borne and held off from God ; you must earnestly intend to watch and fortify those inlets, and not to give away your souls to sense and the things of sense. Trust not your senses and their objects to parley, but under strict inspection. Never suffer, that they should let in upon you what is suitable and grateful to them, at their own pleasure.

You need to have somewhat else than sense, even a spirit of might and power, that may countermand and overrule in every one of those ports, and turn the battle in the gate. Those used to be the places of most strength ; and surely here there needs most. Your case and present state cannot admit, that you securely give up yourselves to unmixed unsolicitous delight, even in the best object. If you intermit care and vigilance, you will soon have such things come in upon you, as will make a worse mixture in your delight, and corrupt and spoil all. Your delight were better to be mixed with holy care, than with sinful vanity ; that tends to preserve, this utterly *to destroy it*. Your state is that of conflict and

warfare; you must be content with such spiritual delight, as will consist with this state. In a time of war and danger, when a city is beset with a surrounding enemy, and all the inhabitants are to be intent upon common safety, their case will not admit that they should entirely indulge themselves in ease and pleasure. And surely it is better to bear the inconvenience of watching and guarding themselves, and enjoy the comforts which a rational probability of safety by such means will allow them, than, merely with the mad hope of procuring themselves an opportunity and vacancy for freer delights, to throw open their gates, and give up themselves and all their delectable things to the rapine and spoil of a merciless enemy. Understand this to be your case. Therefore strictly guard all the avenues of your inward man. It is better to resist there and combat your enemy, than within your walls. There cause every occasion and object, even what importunes and pretends business to you, to make a stand, and diligently examine the errand. Let also, for this purpose, a spirit of wisdom and judgment reside here, that may prudently consider what is to be entertained and what not; and determine and do accordingly. But if you will have no rule over your own spirit, but let it be as a city broken down and without walls,^a—if you will live careless and at ease, and think in this way to have delight in God,—your delight will soon

^a Prov. xxv. 28.

find other objects, and become sensual and impure, and at length turn all to gall and wormwood.

It may be, you have known some of much pretence to piety, that would allow themselves the liberty of being otherwise very pleasant in their usual conversation ; by which you may imagine, that delight in God (which you cannot suppose such persons unacquainted with) may fairly consist with another sort of delight. Nor indeed is it to be doubted but it may ; for the rules and measures, which the holy God hath set us, import no such rigorous severity, nor confine us to so very narrow bounds, but that there is scope and latitude enough left to the satisfaction of sober desires and inclinations that are of a meaner kind. He that hath adjoined the inferior faculties to our natures, and at first created a terrestrial paradise for innocent man, never intended to forbid the gratification of those faculties, nor hath given us any reason to doubt, but that the lower delights, that are suitable to them, might be innocently entertained. Nay, the very rules themselves of temperance and sobriety, which he hath given us for the guiding and governing of sensitive desires, plainly imply, that they are permitted ; for that which ought not to be, is not to be regulated, but destroyed. But then, whereas such rules so limit the inclinations and functions of the low animal life, as that they may be consistent with our end, and subservient to it ; how perverse and wicked an indulgence to them were it, to oppose *them at once both to the authority of him that*

set us those rules, and to our very end itself! That delight in the things of this lower world, which is not by the divine law forbidden or declared evil, either in itself, or by the undue measure or season thereof, is abundantly sufficient for our entertainment, while we are in this our earthly pilgrimage; and so much can never hurt us, nor hinder our higher delights. God hath fenced and hedged them in for us, as a garden inclosed, by his own rules and laws set about them; so that we cannot prejudice or impair them, but by breaking through his inclosure. Our great care and study therefore must be, so to repress and mortify all earthly and sensual inclinations, that they be reduced to a conformity and agreement with his rules and measures; to which they who have no regard, and yet highly pretend to spirituality and to delight in God, only make a fair show, and speak great swelling words of vanity, while their hearts taste nothing of what their tongues utter. Spiritual joy is a severe thing, separated from vain and unbecoming levities as well as from all earthly impurities, and only grows and flourishes in a soul that is dead to this world, and alive to God through Jesus Christ.

See then to the usual temper of your spirit: and do not think it enough, that you hope the great renewing change did sometime pass upon it, and that therefore your case is good and safe, and you may now take your ease and liberty. But be intent upon this, to get into a confirmed *growing spirituality*, and that you may find you

are in your ordinary course after the spirit; ^a then will you savour the things of the spirit, and then especially will the blessed God himself become your great delight,^b and your exceeding joy. Retire yourself from this world, draw off your mind and heart. This is God's great rival. The friendship of this world is enmity to him,^c—which is elsewhere said of the carnal mind;^d that is indeed the same thing, viz., a mind that is over friendly affected towards this world, or not chastely;—wherefore also, in that fore-mentioned Scripture, they that are supposed and suspected to have made themselves, in that undue sense, friends of this world, are bespoken under the names of adulterers and adulteresses. You must cast off all other lovers, if you intend delighting in God.

Get up into the higher region, where you may be out of the danger of having your spirit ingulphed and, as it were, sucked up by the spirit of this world, or of being subject to its debasing stupifying influence. Bear yourself as the inhabitant of another country. Make this your mark and scope, that the temper of your spirit may be such, that the secret of the divine presence may become to you as your very element,—wherein you can most freely breathe and live and be most at ease, and out of which you may perceive you cannot enjoy yourself; and that whatever tends to withdraw you from him, may be sensibly painful and grievous to you. Do not look upon it as a hopeless thing, you

^a *Rom. viii. 5.* ^b *Psal. xliii. 4.* ^c *Jam. iv. 4.* ^d *Rom. viii. 7.*

should ever come to this; some have come to it: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."^a Nor was this only a transient fit with the Psalmist, but we frequently find him speaking the same sense, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."^b And, again, we have the like strains; "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord God of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: blessed are they that dwell in thy House."^c And what was this House more to him than another house, save that here he reckoned upon enjoying the divine presence? So that here was a heart so naturalized to this presence, as to seek an abode in it, and that he might lead his life with God, and dwell with him all his days; he could not be content with giving a visit now and then.

Why should this temper of spirit, in the clearer light of the Gospel, be looked upon as an unattainable thing? A lazy despondency, and the mean conceit that it is modest not to aim so high, starve religion, and stifle all truly noble and generous desires. Let this then be the thing designed with you; and constantly pursue and drive the design, that you may get into this disposition of spirit towards God. His Spirit will not be

^a *Psal.* xxvii. 4.

^b *Ibid.* xxiii. 6.

^c *Ibid.* lxxxiv. 2.

restrained, if it be duly sought and dutifully complied with and obeyed, if you carefully reserve yourself for him, as one whom he hath set apart for himself.^a If you will be entirely his, and keep your distance, using a holy chaste reservedness as to other things, that is, to such things as any way tend to indispose your spirit towards him, or render it less suitable to his converse, He will be no stranger to you. And that it may be more suitable and fit for him, you should habituate and accustom yourself to converse in general with spiritual things. You will be, as the things are with which you most converse; they will leave their stamp and impress on you: wandering after vanity, you will become vain; minding earthly things, you will become earthly. Accordingly, being much taken up with spiritual things, you will bear their image, and become spiritual.

Think how unworthy it is, since you have faculties,—and those now refined and improved by Divine light and grace, and capable of being employed about much higher objects than those of sense,—that you should yield to a confinement to so low and mean things; whence it is, that when you should mind things of a higher nature, it is a strange work with you, and those things with which you should be most familiar, seem odd and uncouth to you, and are all with you as mere shadow and darkness. Urge on your spirit; make it enter into the invisible world. May you not be assured, if you will use your *understanding*, that there are things you never saw,

^a Ps. iv. 3.

unspeakably more excellent and glorious than any thing you have seen, or than can be seen by eyes of flesh.

Why should your mind and thoughts be limited within the narrow bounds of this sublunary world, so small and minute, and, by the apostacy and sin of man, so abject and deformed a part of God's creation? Do not bind down your spirit to the consideration and view of the affairs and concerns only of this region of sin and wretchedness; where few things fall under your notice, that can be a comfortable prospect to a serious spirit. But consider, that as certainly as you behold with your eyes the wickedness and miseries of this forlorn world, that hath forsaken God, and is in great part forsaken by him, so certainly there is a vastly greater world than this, of glorious and innocent creatures, that stand in direct and dutiful subordination to their common Maker and Lord, loving and beloved by him, delighting to do his will, and solacing themselves perpetually in his blessed presence, and in the mutual love, communion, and felicity of one another: to which happy number, or innumerable company rather, as they are called,^a the Redeemer is daily adjoining such as he recovers and translates out of the ruins and desolation of this miserable part of the universe.

Reckon yourself as some way appertaining to that blessed society. Mind the affairs thereof as those of your own country, and that properly belong to you. When we are taught to pray, that

^a Heb. xii. 22.

the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven, can it be supposed, it ought to be a strange thing to our thoughts, how affairs go there? Surely faith and holy reason, well used, would furnish us with regular and warrantable notions of the state of things above, that we should not need to be, as persons that have no concern therein, or, when we are required to be as strangers on earth, that we should rather make ourselves such to heaven.

Let your mind be much employed in considering the state of things between God and his creatures. Design a large field for your thoughts to spread themselves in, and you will also find it a fruitful one; let them run backward and forward, and expatiate on every side. Think, how all things sprang from God, and among them man, that excellent part of this his lower creation; what he was towards God, and what he is now become. Think of the admirable person, the glorious excellencies, the mighty design, the wonderful achievements and performances of the Redeemer; and of the blessed issue he will bring things to at length.

Think of and study much the nature, parts, and accomplishments of the new creature; get your mind well instructed and furnished with apprehensions of the whole entire frame of that holy rectitude, wherein the image of God upon renewed souls doth consist, and of the several lovely ornaments of the hidden man of the heart, —how it is framed and habited, when it is *as it should be*, towards God and towards men. Cast

about, and you will not want matter of spiritual employment and exercise for your minds and hearts; nor have occasion—if any expostulate with you, why you mind this earth and the things of sense so much,—to say, you know not what else to think of; you may surely find many things else. If you would use your thoughts to such converse, and thus daily entertain yourself, in this way you may expect a spiritual frame to grow habitual to you; and then would the rest of your business do itself. You would not need to be pressed and persuaded to delight in God, any more than to do the acts of nature, to eat, and drink, and move, and draw your breath.

Endeavour that the knowledge and conception you have of God, may be more distinct and clear. For observe whether, when you would apply yourself to delight in him, this be not the next, or at least one great obstruction, after that of an indisposed carnal heart, that though you would, and you know it is fit you should do so, yet you know not how to go about it; you are at a loss, what or how to conceive of him. But is it fit, it should be always thus? What, ever learning, and never arriving at this knowledge! It is most true, we can never search out the Almighty unto perfection; and it will always be but a little portion we shall know, of that glorious and incomprehensible Being. But since there is a knowledge of God—which we are required to have our souls furnished with, and whereon eternal life depends,—with all those gracious dispositions *of heart* towards him, that are the beginnings of

that life; certainly the whole compass of our duty and blessedness is not all laid upon an impossibility; and therefore, if we do not so far know him as to love and delight in him above all things, this must be through our own great default, and more to be imputed to our carelessness and our contentedness to be ignorant, than to his being unknowable, or so reserving and shutting up himself from us, that we cannot know him. There are many things belonging to the being of God, which we are not concerned to know, and which it would be a vain and bold curiosity to pry into: but what is necessary to direct our practice, and tends to show how we should be towards him, is not (such has been his gracious vouchsafement,) impossible or difficult to be known. We may apprehend him to be the most excellent Being; and may descend to many particular excellencies, wherein we may easily apprehend him infinitely to surpass all other beings.

We most certainly know, all things were of him, and therefore, that whatsoever excellency we can observe in creatures, must be eminently and in highest perfection in him, without the want of any thing but what doth itself import weakness and imperfection. And hath it not been the errand and business into the world, of Him who lay in his bosom, to declare him?^a And hath not He, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by

^a John i. 18.

whom also he made the worlds, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person? ^a He hath been on earth the visible representation of God to men; the divine glory shone in him; "He dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father,) full of grace and truth;"—was not that divine?

Suppose we then, we had seen Christ in the flesh, and been the constant observers of his whole conversation on earth,—and though we have not seen it, we have sufficient records of his life and actions in our hands,—let us, I say, suppose him from day to day before our eyes, in all his meek, humble, lovely deportment among men, and withal in the beams of majesty that appeared through that veil, wherein he was pleased to inwrap himself. If we could observe him going to and fro, and every where doing good, scattering blessings wherever he went; if we could see with what compassion and tenderness he healed the sick, instructed the ignorant, supplied and fed the hungry and necessitous; how he bore with the weak, forgave the injurious (even against his own life,) and wept over secure and obstinate sinners; with what mighty power he cast out devils, raised the dead, commanded winds and seas, and they obeyed him; with what authority, zeal and conviction he contested against an hypocritical generation of hardened, impenitent, unbelieving wretches, casting flames of holy just displeasure in their faces, and threatening them

with the damnation of hell; and now suppose the veil laid aside, and the lustre of all these excellencies shining forth, without the interposition of any obscuring cloud or shadow;—such a one is The Blessed God. For this was the express image of his person; and, as he himself tells us, they that have seen Him, have seen the Father. ^a Do you not now see one to be delighted in?

But yet further, can you not frame a notion of wisdom, goodness, justice, holiness, truth, power, with other known perfections, all concurring together in a Being purely spiritual, eternally and originally of Himself, the author and original of all things, and who is therefore over all and in all, infinite and unchangeable in all the perfections before-mentioned? Surely such conceptions are not impossible to you:—And this is He, in whom you are to delight.

Lift up then your minds above your senses and all sensible things; use your understandings, whereby you are distinguished from brute creatures. Consider, this is He from whom you and all things sprang, and in whom your life is. Do you perceive life, wisdom, power, love in other things; these must all have some fountain. Other things have not these of themselves, for they are not of themselves, therefore they must derive and partake them from Him; and thence it is evident, they must be in Him in their highest excellency. Of this, your understandings, duly exercised, will render you as sure, as if you

^a John xiv. 9.

saw that infinite glory, in which all these meet, with your eyes : and will assure you, it is so much the more excellent and glorious, for that it cannot be seen with your eyes. You see the external acts and expressions of these things from such creatures as you are : but life, wisdom, power, love, are themselves invisible things, which in themselves you cannot see,—yet you are not the less certain, that there are such things. And do you not find, that the certain proof you have that these things meet in this or that creature, renders it lovely and delightful in your eyes ? especially, if you have, or apprehend you may have, nearest interest in such a creature ? The blessed God not only hath these things in himself, but is these very things himself ; therefore must be invisible, as they are ; and because he not only hath them, but is what they are, therefore they are in him perfectly, unchangeably and eternally, as being his very essence. Think then of a Being that is pure, original, substantial,—life, wisdom, power, love ; and how infinitely amiable and delectable should that ever blessed Being be unto you !

Converse with the word of God. Read his descriptions of Himself ; and do not content yourselves to have the words and expressions before your eyes, or in your mouths, that represent to you his nature and attributes ; but make your pauses, and consider the things themselves signified by them ; that is, when you read passages of his own holy book, such as tell you his name, that He is the Lord, the Lord

God, gracious and merciful,^a &c.—or that tell you He is light, He is love, He is God only wise, He is the Almighty, God all-sufficient, He is all in all, and that the heavens, and heaven of heavens cannot contain Him ;—or wherein you find him admired as glorious in holiness ;—or that say, He is what He is, that He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, &c.—labour to fix the apprehension and true import of all such expressions deep in your mind ; that you may have an entire and well formed representation of him before you, to which you may upon all occasions have recourse, and not be at a loss, every time you are to apply yourselves to any converse with him, what or how to conceive of him. And because mere words, though they may furnish you with a more full and comprehensive notion of him, yet may not give you a lively one, or powerfully strike your heart, compare with that account, which his word gives you of him, the works which your eyes may daily behold, and which you are assured were wrought and done by him. To read or hear of his wisdom, power, goodness, &c. and then to have their visible effects within your constant view, that so fully correspond to what his Word hath said of him, and demonstrate him to be what you were told he is,—how mighty a confirmation doth this carry with it ! You may behold somewhat of Him in every creature. All his works not only represent, but even praise and commend him to you.

^a Exod. xxxiv. 6.

Above all, since He is only to be seen in his own light, pray earnestly and continually to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, that he would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.^a From such as so desire to know him, he will not conceal himself. This is your more direct following on to know the Lord; in which case he hath said, you shall know, and that his going forth shall be prepared as the morning. By your craving looks, and the expecting posture of your waiting eye, you draw forth and invite his enlightening communications, which do but wait for an invitation. For it is most reasonable you should feel your want, and express your desire of what is so precious, before you find it. Hereby, you put yourselves amidst the glorious beams of his vital pleasant light, or open your souls to admit and let it in upon you. And when he finds it is with you a thing desired and longed for, he takes more pleasure in imparting, than you can take pains in seeking, or pleasure in receiving it.

Nor yet, when you have thus attained to some competent measure of the knowledge of God, are you to satisfy yourselves that now you are not altogether ignorant: but employ your knowledge in frequent and solemn thinking on him; which is the next end of that knowledge, and a further great means to your delighting in him. Your knowledge of God signifies little to this purpose or any other, if, as it gives you the advantage of

^a Eph. i. 17.^b Hosea vi. 3.

having frequent actual thoughts of him, it be not used to this end. Not having this knowledge, when you would set yourselves seriously to think on God, you are lost in the dark, and know not which way to turn yourselves; and having it, you will be as much strangers to delight in him, if you let your knowledge lie bound up in dead and spiritless notion, and labour not to have it turned into active life and fervent love, by the agitation of your working thoughts. By your musing this fire must be kindled. Do you suppose it possible, to delight in God and not think of him? If God be the solace and joy of your souls, surely it must be God remembered and minded much, not neglected and forgotten. My soul, saith the Psalmist, shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee on my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.^a And he at the same time says, his meditation of him shall be sweet, when he says he will be glad in the Lord.^b

Your delight in God can find no way into your hearts, but by the introduction of your exercised minds. There the matter must be prepared and formed, by which your delight is to be nourished and maintained. Hereto then you must apply yourselves with design, and with serious diligence, and take pains with your recoiling thoughts. Do not make that fulsome pretence, to excuse your slothful neglect, that you cannot command your

^a Psalm lxiii. 6.

^b Ibid civ. 34.

own thoughts. The thing itself is unquestionably true, and that you are not of yourselves sufficient to think any thing that is good, as of yourselves ; and so you may truly enough say, that you cannot think any thought at all without God, or so much as draw a breath. Only, as besides your natural dependence on God for the support of your natural life and being, there must be that course taken, and those things done, by which, in an orderly course of providence, you may live ; so, for the maintaining of your spiritual life, which very much stands in delight and joy in God, you must join a spiritual dependence for that special influence and concurrence which are necessary hereto, with the doing of such things as by God's appointment and prescription are to serve this end. They who complain, therefore, they cannot attain to delight in God, or that their delight in him is faint and languishing,—while in the mean time they use no endeavour to bend and direct their thoughts towards him,—make as idle a complaint, as he who says, he is in a miserable starving condition, and that nothing nourishes him, yet is so wretchedly slothful, that he will be at no pains to prepare, or so much as eat, his own necessary food. You may not imagine, you have all that is needful, for the well governing of your spirits, in your own hands and power : nor ought you therefore to think, that what is simply needful is not to be had. God is not behind-hand with you ; He is no such hard task-master, as to require brick and allow no straw : but may most righteously say, ye are idle, and do therefore only

complain like the sluggard in his bed, whose hands cannot endure to labour. You dare not deliberately go to God, and tell him—you do all you can to fix the thoughts of your hearts on him, and yet it will not be,—or that he will give you no help. Though he can be no way indebted to you, but by his own free promise, he giveth meat to them that fear him, being ever mindful of his covenant,—yea he doth it for ravens and sparrows; he will not then famish the souls that cry to him, and wait on him; their heart shall live, that seek God. It is becoming and suitable to the state of things between him and you, that he should put you upon seeking, that you may find; your reasonable nature and faculties—especially being already rectified in some measure, and enlivened by his grace and spirit,—require to be held to such terms. It is natural to you to think; and there is nothing more suitable to the new creature, than that you apply and set yourselves to think on him, and that your thoughts be set and held on work, to enquire and seek him out. Know, therefore, you do not your parts, unless you make this more your business. To be more particular :—

Solemnly set yourselves on chosen times to think on God. Meditation is of itself a distinct duty, and must have a considerable time allowed it among the other exercises of the christian life. It challenges a just share and part in the time of our lives: and he in whom we are to place our *delight*, is, you know, the prime and chief object of *this holy work*. Is it reasonable that he who

is our life and our all, should never be thought on, but now and then, as it were by chance, and on the by? "My meditation on him shall be sweet." Does not that imply, that it was with the Psalmist a designed thing to meditate on God, that it was a stated course? It was become so customary to him, and so much his ordinary practice to appoint times for meditating on God, that he promises himself satisfaction and solace of soul herein. Let, then, your eyes herein prevent the night-watches. Reckon, you have neglected one of the most important businesses of the day, if you have omitted this, and that to such omissions you owe your little delight in God. Wherein therefore are you to repair yourselves, but by redressing this great neglect?

Think often of him amidst your other affairs. Every one, as he is called,—be his state or way of living what it will, be he bond or free,—is required therein to abide with God.* And how is that, but by often thinking of him, as being a great part of what is meant by this abiding? How grateful a mixture would the thoughts of God make with that great variety of other things, which we are necessarily to be concerned in, while we are in this world! If they be serious and right thoughts, they will be accompanied with some relish of sweetness, and at least tend to keep the heart in a disposition for more delightful solemn intercourses with God.

It is a sad truth, that whatsoever there is,

* 1 Cor. vii. 24.

either of sinfulness or uncomfortableness in the lives of those who have engaged and devoted themselves to God, proceeds in greatest part from their neglect to mind God;—a thing (if due heed were taken of it) so easy, so little laborious, and so sure to be recompensed with unspeakable pleasure, that their being so often lost in darkness, drowned in carnality, buried in earthliness, and overwhelmed with miseries and desolations of spirit, is all for want of a right employing of their thoughts; they set their thoughts upon things that tend either to corrupt and deprave their spirits, or to disquiet and afflict them.

At this inlet, and by the labour of their own thoughts, sins and calamities are brought in upon them as a flood; which very thoughts, if they were placed and exercised aright, would let in God upon them, fill them with his fulness, replenish their souls with his light, grace, and consolations. How much more easy an exercise were it, to keep their thoughts employed upon one object that is ever full, delectable, and present, than to divide them among many, that are to be pursued with anxiety, toil, and very often with disappointment, or to be enjoyed (if they be things that have an appearance of good in them) with much danger and damage to their spirits, and with little satisfaction,—or (if they appear evil) to be endured with pain and sorrow! So that the labour of their thoughts, among those many things, brings them in torture, when *their rest upon God alone would be all pleasure,*

delight, and joy. Here their souls might dwell at ease, ^a (or, as those words import, rest in goodness,) with that quiet repose which men are wont to take by night, after weariness from the labour of the foregoing day.

And if no such sweet and pleasant fruit were to be hoped for from the careful government and ordering of our thoughts, is the obligation of God's law in this matter nothing with us? Are we not bound so much as to think of him, whom we are bound to fear and love, to trust and obey above all things? What is loving God with all our mind, so expressly mentioned in that great summary of our duty towards him? Or what can it mean, after the required love of all the heart and all the soul, adding so particularly "with all thy mind,"—when the mind, we know, is not the seat of love? Surely, at least, it cannot but imply, that our thoughts must be much exercised upon God even by the direction of our love, and that our love must be maintained by thoughts of him : that our minds and hearts must continually correspond and concur to the loving of God; and so our whole soul be exercised and set on work therein.

What doth it mean, that our youth is challenged to the remembrance of him?^b Is our riper age more exempt? Do we, as we longer live by him, owe him less? Does it signify nothing with us, that the wicked bear this brand in the Scriptures, "They that forget God,"^c and that

^a *Psal.* xxv. 13.

^b *Eccl.* xii. 1.

^c *Psal.* ix. 16.

it is a distinguishing character of his own people, "that they thought on his name?" Why do we suppose our thoughts exempt from his government or the obligation of his laws? Why should it be reckoned less insolent to say, "our thoughts are our own," than "our tongues are our own,"—"who is Lord over us?" May we do what we will with our thoughts? Who gave us our thinking power, or made us capable of forming a thought? And now, will we assume the confidence to tell God, we think on him all we can? How many idle thoughts in the day might we have exchanged for thoughts of God! and every thought have been to us a spring of pleasure, and holy delight in him! Know, then, that if ever you will do anything in this great matter of delighting in God, you must arrest your thoughts for him, and engage them in more constant converse with him. And withal mix prayers with those thoughts; or let them often be praying craving thoughts, such as may carry with them annexed desires: or wherein your heart may breathe out requests, such as that, for instance, "Rejoice the soul of thy servant; for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul."^a See, they be spiritual thoughts, that carry life in them, and aim to draw more.

But now our thoughts may be conversant about him under very various considerations, and all of them very delightful. And this variety may much increase our delight, while our minds converse

^a Psal. lxxxvi. 4.

with him, now under one notion, then under another. They are apt to tire and grow weary, being long employed the same way upon the same thing. And it were an injury to the blessed God himself, when he presents himself under various aspects and appearances, so to take notice of any one, as to overlook and neglect the rest. Therefore, look often to him according as, absolutely considered, he is in himself the most excellent Being; and as, in reference to his creatures, he is the supreme Author and Lord of all. There is an unspeakable pleasure to be taken in him so beheld. Too many, while their distrust or their carnality and strangeness to God hold them in suspense concerning their own special relation to him, are apt to fancy themselves excused from delighting in him:—it belongs not to them, they think, but to some familiar friends, and great favourites of his, to whom he expresses special kindness, and on whom he places the marks of his more peculiar good will. But do you think so to shift and waive the obligation of an universal law upon mankind and all reasonable nature? You are to remember, as hath been said, your delight in God is not to be considered only as your privilege, but as an act of homage to Him who made you, and put an intelligent apprehensive spirit into you, by which you are capable of knowing who made you, and of beholding your Maker's excellency with admiration and delight. And if now you are become guilty and vile, will you run into darkness and hide yourselves from him, or close your eyes, and say, the sun doth

not shine, and deny the blessed glorious God to be what most truly and unchangeably he is? Whatever you are, whatever you have desired he should be towards you, yet do him right. Behold and confess his glorious excellency, every way most worthy to be delighted in. Nor have you rendered yourselves so vile, nor have you so much cause of apprehending his displeasure towards you, by anything so much as this,—your not having taken delight in him all this while, and by your neglect to take the ways tending to bring you thereto. If you think you have no special relation to him, do you think you ever shall, if you continue, in the temper of your spirits, strangers to him, and look upon him as one in whom you are to take no delight? Surely, it is your dutiful affection towards him, and your complacency in him, that must give you ground to hope you are his, and he is yours; and, therefore, the beginnings and first degrees of that complacency and delight must be in you before,—being begotten by the view of that excellency which he hath in himself, antecedently to his being related to you. Even if your relation to him were already as sure and evident to you, as can be supposed; yet are you to take heed of confining your delight in him to that consideration of him only, and of making it the chief reason of your delight: for so your delight in him will be more for your own sakes, or upon your own account than his. Learn to look upon *things* as they are, and not according to their *aspect* upon your affairs. Is it not a greater *thing* that he is God, than that he is yours?

It is a purer, a more noble and generous affection to him, which you are to aim at, than what is measured only by your private interest. Is that boundless fulness of life, glory, and all perfection, treasured up in the eternal and incomprehensible Being, to be estimated by the capacity and concerns of a silly worm? That consideration, therefore, being sometime laid aside, sit down and contemplate God as He is in himself, not disowning—as it is not fit you should—but only waiving the present consideration of any more comfortable relation, wherein you may, though most justly, suppose him to stand to you; and see, if you cannot take pleasure in this, that He is great and glorious, and that you have a Being every way perfect before your eyes. Try, if it will not be pleasant to you, to fall down before him and give him glory, to join your praises and triumphant songs to those of saints and angels: and how much more it will add to your satisfaction, to behold and acknowledge him exalted above all blessing and praise. How great delight hath been taken in him upon such accounts! In what transports have holy souls been, upon the view and contemplation of his sovereign power and dominion, his wise and righteous government, his large and flowing goodness that extends in common to all the works of his hands! Labour to imitate the ingenuous and loyal affection of this kind, whereof you find many expressions in the sacred volume. For what hath been matter of delight to saints of old, ought surely still to be as much accounted so. To give instances:—

You sometimes find them in a most complacent adoration of his wonderful wisdom and counsels.—O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!^a And again, To God only wise be glory, through Jesus Christ for ever.^b—To the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God be honour and glory for ever.^c—To the only wise God our Saviour be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, now and ever.^d

Elsewhere, we have them in transports admiring his Holiness.—Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods ! Who is like thee, glorious in holiness !^e—There is none holy as the Lord ; for there is none besides thee, neither is there any rock like our God !^f And this is recommended and enjoined to his holy ones, as the special matter of their joy and praise : “ Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.”^g

At other times, we have their magnificent celebrations of his glorious power, and that by way of triumph over the pagan gods : “ Our God is in the heavens ; He hath done whatsoever he pleased. Their idols are silver and gold,”^h &c.—Be thou exalted, O God, in thine own strength. We will sing and praise thy power.ⁱ—Forsake me not, until I have shewed thy strength unto this gene-

^a Rom. xi. 33.^b Ibid. xvi. 27.^c 1 Tim. i. 17.^d Jude 25.^e Exod. xv. 11.^f 1 Sam. ii. 2.^g Ps. xcvi. 12.^h Ibid. cxv.ⁱ Ibid. xxi. 13.

ration, and thy power to every one that is to come.^a This is given out as the Song of Moses and the Lamb; "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy Name? Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty."

How they magnify his mercy and goodness both towards his own people, and his creatures in general!—O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, that thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the children of men!^b—Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright: Praise the Lord with harp: Sing unto him with the psaltery."^c—"The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. I will extol thee my God, O King, I will bless thy name for ever and ever."^d—Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, they shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.—To insert all that might be mentioned to this purpose, were to transcribe a great part of the Bible.

In what raptures do we often find them, in the contemplation of his faithfulness and truth, his justice and righteousness, his eternity, the boundlessness of his presence, the greatness of his works, the extensiveness of his dominion, the

^a Ps. lxxi. 18.

^b Ibid. xxxi. 19.

^c Ibid. xxxiii. 1, &c.

^d Ibid. cxlv. 1, &c.

perpetuity of his kingdom, the exactness of his government!—Who is a strong Lord like unto thee, or to thy faithfulness round about thee!^a—Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds.^b—Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth or the world, from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God.^c—But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.^d—The works of the Lord are great, sought out of them that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious.^e—All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, and thy Saints shall bless thee; they shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power: to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious Majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.^f

His glory, in general, which results from his several excellencies in conjunction, how loftily is it often celebrated, with the expression of the most loyal desires, that it may be every where renowned, and with greatest complacency, in as far as it is apprehended so to be.—The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever. They shall sing in the ways of the Lord; for great is the glory of the Lord. Be thou exalted above the heavens.

^a *Ps. lxxxix.* 8.

^b *Ibid.* xxxvi. 5.

^c *Ibid.* xc. 2.

^d *1 Kings viii.* 27.

^e *Ps. cxi.* 3.

^f *Ibid.* cxlv. 10.

Let thy glory be above all the earth.^a—Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and the heavens.^b When you read such passages as these, —whether they be eulogies or commendations of him, or doxologies and direct attributions of glory to him,—you are to bethink yourselves, with what temper of heart these things were uttered! with how raised and exalted a spirit! what high delight and pleasure was conceived in glorifying God, or in beholding him glorious! How large and unbounded a heart, and how full of his praise, still every where discovers itself in such strains; —when all nations, when all creatures, when every thing that hath breath, when heaven and earth are invited together, to join in the concert, and bear a part in his praises!

And, now, eye him under the same notions, under which you have seen him so magnified, that in the same way you may have your own heart wrought up to the same pitch and temper towards him. Should it not provoke an emulation, and make you covet to be amidst the throng of loyal and devoted souls, when you see them ascending, as if they were all incense! when you behold them dissolving and melting away in delight and love, and ready to expire, even fainting that they can do no more, designing that their very last breath shall go forth in the close of a song? “I will sing unto the Lord, as long as I live, I will sing praise to my God while I have my being!”^c How becoming is it, to resolve, This shall be my aim and

^a Ps. civ. 31. Ibid. cxxxviii. 5. Ibid. lvii. 7. 11.

^b Ibid. cxlviii. 13.

^c Ibid. civ. 33.

ambition, to fly the same, and, if it were possible, a greater height.

Read over such psalms as are more especially designed for the magnifying of God;^a and when you see, what were the things that were most taking to so spiritual and pious hearts, thence receive instruction, and aim to have your hearts alike affected and transported with the same things. Frame the supposition, that you are meant, that the invitation is directed to you, “O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise to him with psalms; for the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.” Think with yourselves, Is he not as great as he was? Is he not as much our Maker as he was theirs? Is it not now as true, that the Lord reigneth, and is high above all the earth, and exalted far above all gods? Now, since these were the considerations, upon which so great complacency was taken in him, set the same before your own eyes. And since these were proposed as the matter of so common a joy, and the creation seems designed for a musical instrument of as many strings as there are creatures in heaven and earth, awake, and make haste to get your heart fixed; lest the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad, the world and all that dwell therein,—lest the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, the floods clap their hands, the fields and the hills be joyful together, and all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord,—while *you only* are silent and unconcerned.

^a Ps. viii. xlviii. xcvi. xcvi. xcvi. xcvi. xcix., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

The same Subject continued.

SERIOUSLY consider the kind and nature of that joy and delight in God, wherewith the hearts of holy men of old did so exceedingly abound;—which is to be collected from the expressed ground and reasons of it, wheresoever you have any discovery of that joy itself. This general and principal character may be given of it, that it was a sincerely devout and loyal joy; not a mean narrow selfish pleasure, not a hugging of themselves in this apprehension merely, ‘It is well with me, I am safe and happy whatsoever becomes of the world.’ This was still the burden of their song; The Lord is great and glorious and excellent; He is exalted, and most high over all. And it is to be observed, that as this was the common and more usual strain and temper of holy souls, in the ages whereof the Scriptures give us any account; so were doubts and fears and troubled thoughts, concerning their own interest in God, a great deal less usual and common in those days. So that, in proportion to the other pious and holy exercises of such as truly feared God and were devoted to him, there is little account given to

us of any thing of that kind in the sacred writings, and especially in the New Testament of our Lord:—an argument, that such as were sincerely religious were most taken up about the interest of God and Christ in the world, rejoicing either in the observation of its growth and increase, or in the hope and confidence that it should grow; and further, that they were much less concerned about their own interest, and that this course thrived best with them. While they were most intent upon the affairs of their common Lord, their own were well enough provided for. We cannot, therefore, but note hereupon by the way, how altered a thing religion is now become. Almost the whole business of it, even among them that more seriously mind any thing belonging to it, is a fear of going to hell; and hence, perpetual endless scruples, doubts and enquiries about marks and signs, and how to know what is the least degree of that grace, which is necessary to their being saved. As if the intention were to beat down the price to the very lowest, and dodge always, and cheapen heaven to the utmost;—it may be feared, with a design not to aim at any thing higher than what is merely necessary to that purpose only, and never to mind being excellent, but only being saved.

Did those holy men delight and please themselves in nothing but a warm sun and halcyon seasons? Surely they had matter little enough for that sort of joy. Did they therefore dejectedly *languish* and despond, and give themselves up to *sorrow* and despair? Nor that either. Unless they

had all had only one neck, and that also had been perfectly in the enemies' power, it had been an impossible thing to stifle and extinguish their delight and joy;—so fully did Christ make it good to them, that their sorrow should be turned into joy, and their joy should no man take from them. For even that increased it, which aimed at its suppression. They had got a secret way of rejoicing in tribulation, of counting it all joy when they fell into divers trials, of taking pleasure in reproaches for the sake of Christ, of turning difficulties and hazards into matter of triumph, of taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and glorying to be counted worthy to suffer any thing for so excellent a name. Insomuch, that though their Head and Lord was in a most ignominious way taken from them, and they left as a despised party of men in the midst of an outrageous world, under the seemingly hopeless profession of addictedness to the interest of a man that died upon a cross among thieves but the other day,—and though many of them never saw his face, but had their knowledge of him by report and hearsay,—yet believing, they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.^a The matter and ground of their joy was not so uncertain and changeable a thing, nor so light and unsubstantial as the world's kindness and favour, and the smooth face of a serene sky. These were true lovers of Christ,—such as counted him worthy, for whom they should do all that lay in their

^a 1 Pet. i. 8.

power, and upon his account suffer all which it was in the power of any others to do against them.

They that rejoice and place their delight in the blessed God himself, through Jesus Christ, have for the object of their joy the Everlasting I AM; Him who is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever: whose excellent glory may be clouded indeed and eclipsed to the world and to the eye of sense, but still shines in itself and to the eye of faith, with the same bright and undiminished lustre.

That delight will be continued and permanent, and ever springing up in fresh liveliness and vigour, which is taken in this blessed object (considered as it is in itself,) and which hath a place in a soul that acts in a steady direct course towards that object, without sinister or selfish respects, of even the highest kind,—otherwise than in that subordination which will be suitable to the vast disproportion and inequality between God's interest and ours.

See, then, that yours be a well complexioned delight, such as inwardly partakes of the true nature of religion, i. e., which hath in it entire devotedness to God as its very life, soul, and spirit. If this be not the thing, but mere self-satisfaction is what you chiefly have in pursuit under the name of delight in God, you beat the air, and do but hunt after a shadow. For there is no such thing as real solid delight in God any where existing, or ever will be, separately and *apart from* a supreme love and addictedness of *heart to him* and to his interest, as our chief and

utmost end:—which temper of spirit towards him must be maintained and improved by our fixed intuition and view of his glorious greatness, absolute excellency and perfection; and by the apprehension, which we thereupon have, of the congruity and fitness that we and all things should be wholly to Him, and that He alone may have the glory.

Though you are not to prefer the consideration of your own interest in God as the good most suitable to you, nor give it the highest place in your delight, yet you must take heed of neglecting it, or of denying it any place at all. For though we may plainly observe, as hath been said, that it was the usual temper of holy men of old, to be most taken up in admiring God upon the account of his own excellency and glory, considered in itself, and may thence collect that to be the genuine right temper of a gracious heart; yet it is as evident, that they were far from neglecting their own interest in God, and that they counted it not a small matter; yea, that it had, though not the principal, a very great influence upon their delight and joy in him. No one can read the Bible, and not have frequent occasion to take notice of this. For how often do we find Him spoken of under the names of their “Portion,” “Heritage,” &c.; and in what raptures of joy do we often find them upon that account! So the Psalmist considers Him, when he says, that the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places, and he had a goodly heritage.* How often do we find them

* Ps. xvi. 6.

glorying in their relation by covenant, and making their boast of him as their God ; “ I will love thee, O Lord, my strength,”^a &c. You have “ my ” no less than nine times repeated in the beginning of that Psalm, *My* strength, *my* rock, *my* fortress, *my* deliverer, *my* God, &c. And afterwards how glorious a triumph is there raised, and in what exultation do we behold them upon this ? “ Who is God save the Lord, and who is a rock save our God ? ”^b And again, “ The Lord liveth ; blessed be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted.” This was some of the last holy breath uttered by that Anointed One of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel ; “ He hath made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure : and this is all my salvation and all my desire.”^c With this, how well satisfied and pleased did he expire, and go down to the grave ! The people of God are sometimes represented as so taken with this apprehension of their peculiar relation to God, that they cannot be content to know, but they must proclaim it ; nor was it enough the present age should know, but they must have it told to the following generation. “ Let Mount Sion rejoice : mark her bulwarks, consider her palaces : that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God.”^d See their glorying in him, “ This God ! ” Behold what a God have we ! View him well, and take notice how glorious a God He is. And as they glory in the greatness of

^a *Psal.* xviii. 1.

^b Verse 31.

^c 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

^d *Psal.* xlviii. 10.

the God, to whom they were related, so they do in the eternity of the relation. "This God is our God for ever and ever!" How inexpressible was the inward pleasure, wherewith we may suppose those words to have been uttered, "God, even our own God, shall bless us!"^a How delightful an appropriation! as if it were intended to be said, The blessing itself were less significant, it could not have that savour with it, if it were not from our own God. Not only therefore allow but urge your spirits thus to look towards God, that you may delight in him, as being in himself the one most excellent, and also as being yours; for know, you are not permitted only, but obliged to eye, accept, and rejoice in him as such. It is his first and great law, and the form of his covenant which he requires you to enter into with him, to take him for your God. Herein to be shy and to decline, is to rebel. And when he offers himself, in all his richness, to be your 'portion and your God, how vile ingratitude were it to neglect and overlook the kindness of the overture. It is his glory to have indigent souls satiating themselves in him, drawing from him their vital breath, living upon him as their all; confessing they cannot live, but by his vouchsafed communications. And if you should say you love him, but, so he be ever glorious in himself, you care not to be happy; it would sound like a hollow compliment. You are not to deal with a God upon such terms. It becomes you not, nor is it suitable to him. It is

^a Psal. lxxvii. 6.^b Ibid. xlii. 8.

fit for you to own it to him, that he is your life, that you are a mere nothing in yourself, and must seek your all in him. Your song and your prayer must be directed to him as the God of your life. ^a You do not own him as God, except you own and adore him as your all-sufficient good, and that fulness which filleth all in all. You detract from the glory of his Godhead, if you attribute not this to him, and if accordingly, as one that cannot live without him, you do not seek union with him, and join yourself to him, and then rejoice and solace yourself in that blessed union.

If you be not sure as yet that he is yours, your delighting in him is not therefore to be suspended and delayed until you be. But in the mean time delight in him as willing to become yours. To disbelieve that he is willing, is to give him the lie. It is the great design of the Gospel, so to represent him to you. See that your hearts embrace and close with that as a most delightful and lovely representation;—The great and glorious Lord of heaven and earth offering himself in all his fulness to be thine, thy portion and thy God for ever! How transporting should this be to you! Nor, if you suspect the sincerity of your own heart towards him, (which is the only thing you can have any pretence to suspect, for it were a blasphemy to his truth and goodness to intimate a suspicious thought of him,) may you therefore spend all your time in anxious enquiries, or in looking only upon your own evil heart;

^a Ps. xlii. 8.

but look most, and with a direct and steady eye towards him. Behold and view well his glory and his love, that by this means your heart may be captivated and more entirely won to him.

This makes delight in God a strange thing in the hearts and practice of many. They find too much cause of complaint concerning their own hearts, that they are disaffected and disinclined toward God. And what is the course they take hereupon? Their religion is nothing but complaint. And all their days are spent in beholding that they are bad, without ever taking the way to become better. They conclude their case to be evil and full of danger, because they find they can take no delight in God; and they will take no delight in him, because they have that apprehension of the danger of their case. So their not delighting in God resolves into itself; and they delight not in him, because they delight not in him. It is strange that the absurdity of this is not more reflected on. What now is to be done in this case? To rest here is to be held in a circle of sin and misery all your days; and would signify as if delighting in God were a simple impossibility, or as if not to delight in God were a thing so highly rational, as to be its own sufficient self-justification; and that it were reason enough not to delight in him because we do not. There can be no other way to be taken, but to behold more of him in that discovery, which his gospel sets before your eyes, and in that way to seek to have your hearts taken with his amiableness and love, and allured to delight in him. Labour in this

way to have that delight so increased, that it may cease to be a question or doubt with you, whether you delight in God or no? Whereas you before took delight in him, because, being in himself so excellent, he hath freely offered himself to you to become yours, you may now delight in him, because you are sure he is so;—whereof you cannot have a more satisfying assurance than from his express saying, I love them that love me;^a and we love him because he first loved us.^b

Take especial heed of more apparent and grosser transgressions. And account not your security from the danger of them so much to stand in your being ordinarily out of the way of temptations, as in an habitual frame of holiness, and the settled aversion of your heart to them. Endeavour a growing conformity to God in the temper of your spirit, and to be in love with purity; that your heart may no more endure an impure thought, than you would fire in your bosom. If you be herein careless and remiss, and suffer your heart to grow dissolute, or more bold and adventurous in admitting sinful thoughts,—or if you have more liking or less dislike of any wicked course wherein others take their liberty,—you are approaching the borders of a dangerous precipice. And if some greater breach hereupon ensue between God and you, what becomes of your delight in him? A sad interruption of such pleasant intercourse cannot but follow, both on his part, and on yours.

^a Prov. viii. 17.

^b 1 John iv. 19.

On his part, will ensue a suspension and restraint of those communications of light and grace, which are necessary to your delight in him. He will be just, in his way of dealing towards those of his own family, as well as merciful. It appears how much David's delight in God was intermitted upon his great transgression, through God's withdrawing from him,—when he prays he would restore the joy of his salvation.^a

On your part, will ensue less liking of God's presence, and dread of it. Your inclination will not be towards him as before; though the act of sin be soon over, the effect will remain; even a carnal frame of spirit, that disaffects converse with God, and cares not to come nigh him. And if that were not, a guilty fear would hold you off; so that, if you were willing, you would not dare to approach him. Your liberty taken to sin would soon infer a bondage upon your spirit toward God, unless conscience be wholly asleep, and you have learned a stupid insolent confidence to affront God. Thou shalt put away iniquity from thy tabernacles, then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty; and shalt lift up thy face unto God.^b The conscience of unpurged iniquity will not let you lift up your face or appear in that glorious presence.

Cherish the great grace of humility; and be ever mean and low in your own eyes. That temper carries in it even a natural disposition to delight in God. How sweet complacency will

^a Ps. li. 12.

^b Job xxii. 26.

such a soul take in him! His light and glory shine with great lustre in the eyes of such a one, while there is not a nearer imagined lustre to vie therewith:—stars are seen at noon, by them that descend low into a deep pit. They will admire God but little, that admire themselves much; and take little pleasure in him, who are too much pleased with themselves. How sweet a relish have his love and grace to a humble lowly soul, that esteems itself less than the least of his mercies! With what ravishing delight will divine mercy be entertained, when it is so unexpectedly vouchsafed; when this shall be the sense of the soul, now caught into the embraces of God's love, —“What, I, vile creature! impure worm! what, beloved of God!” Expectation, grounded especially upon an opinion of merit, would unspeakably lessen a favour, if it were afforded. But the lowly soul, that apprehends deserving of nothing but hell, is surprised and overcome with wonder and delight, when the great God expresses kindness towards it. Besides, he more freely communicates himself to such: “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit,”^a &c. He looks to such, with a design of habitation; heaven and earth are not to him so pleasant a dwelling. Down then into the dust; there you are in the fittest place and posture for delightful converse with God.

Reckon much upon an eternal abode in that

^a Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

presence, where is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. Enjoy, by a serious believing foresight, the delights of heaven ; labour to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Look beyond this your present state. Confine not your eye and delight to what is now to be enjoyed, but think of what shall be. Set before your eyes the glorious prospect of the blessed God communicating himself to that vast assembly of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, in clearest discoveries of his glory, and richest effusions of his goodness. The best appearance of things in this world makes but a dull scene in comparison of that. If you look towards God, according to what now appears of his glory in the frame of the universe, and the course of his administrations and government over his creatures, He hath not, it is true, left himself without witness : and you may behold much, that would be to you the matter of delightful admiration, if your eye be clear, and can pierce through clouds and darkness and a manifold veil. He hath made this world, and is every where in it, but it knows him not. His light shines in darkness, that doth not comprehend it. Beams of his glory every where break forth, through every creature, providence, law, and ordinance of his. But much of his glory, that shines in the creation, is hid by a train of second causes, through which few look to the first. His laws men judge of according to their interests and inclinations, while the holy glorious majesty, that enacted them, is out of sight. His work in the world is carried on in a mystery ; his

interest lives, but is depressed; they who are most devoted to him are supported indeed by his invisible hand, but are, in the mean time, low for the most part, and afflicted. If you now limit and confine your apprehensions of him to his present appearances, the matter of your delight is real, but much diminished: but conceive of him—as your faith can behold him at a distance—in that posture wherein, having settled the eternal state of things, he will finally shew himself. Conceive him as having now gathered home all that have been recovered to him out of the apostacy, and joined them to those numberless legions of innocent and pure spirits about his throne, that never offended: conceive him as dispensing rewards,—pouring out blessings upon the loyal heads and hearts of them, that expressed fidelity and duty to him in the time and state of trial and temptation,—letting his glory shine out with bright and direct beams, to so many beholding and admiring eyes,—giving forth the full and satisfying communications of his love, and making rivers of pleasure flow perpetually, to the replenishing the vast enlarged capacities of so innumerable a multitude of grateful adoring spirits, to whom it is now sensibly to be perceived how his fulness filleth all in all. Take this view of him; and let your faith and hope thus enter into that which is within the veil. Remember, there is only a little time between you and that blessed state; that then you are to enter into the joy of your *Lord*, so that the very element and region, where-in you are to live for ever, shall be nothing else

but delight and joy. In this way of believing foresight, and by this lawful and allowed prepossession of future blessedness, much surely would be added to your present delight in God. Should not the thoughts of Him be pleasant to you, from whom you are expecting so great things? If your delight in him be any at all, upon what you have already found and experienced of his goodness, it should be abundantly the more upon what you are encouraged by his word to look for.

Having thus given some account in what way delight in God is to be exercised and improved,—it were a charitable hope, that there would be little need to propound arguments to persuade unto it. But it were a hope not grounded upon common experience,—which too plainly tells us, that though such directions as these are plain and obvious, and not unknown to Christians, but only less considered, yet delight in God obtains little place in the practice of the most. There will, therefore, too probably be still much need of excitation to it.

Yet because it is not a multitude of words that is likely to do the business, but the weight of things urged on by a more powerful hand than that of man,—and much may be collected to this purpose from what hath been said of the sinfulness of the omission,—I shall with great brevity offer only these things to be considered:—

Is it not a merciful vouchsafement, that the holy God allows you to place your delight on him, and invites you to it? How much grace and love breathes in these words, “Delight thyself also in the

Lord!" Trust in him was recommended before, and now, this being added, how plain is it that your ease and rest are the thing designed! Is it fit to receive so much kindness with neglect?

Again, He delights in you,—I speak to such, of whom this may be supposed,—and it is indefinitely said, "His delights were with the sons of men."^a Think what he is, and what you are; and, at once, both wonder and yield.—What else have you to delight in? what thing will you name, that shall supply the place of GOD, or be to you in the stead of him? Moreover, who should delight in Him but you—his friends—his sons—those of his own house?—Think what life and vigour it will infuse into you, and that the joy of the Lord will be your strength.^b How pleasantly will you hold on your course, and discharge all the other duties of this your present state! You must serve him. Dare you think of throwing off his yoke? How desirable is it then to take delight in him, whom I must serve;—which only makes that service acceptable to him, and easy to myself?

Further, this is a pleasure none can rob you of, a joy that cannot be taken from you. Other objects of your delight are vanishing daily. Neither men nor devils can ever hinder your delighting in God, if your hearts be so inclined. Were you never brought to take pleasure in any person or thing, to which you had a former aversion? One that had wronged you, might yet

^a Prov. viii. 31.

^b Nehem. viii. 10.

possibly win you by after kindness. Give a reason, why you should be more difficult towards the Blessed God, who never wronged you, and whose way towards you hath constantly imported so much good-will!

Consider, your condition on earth is such, as exposes you to many sufferings and hardships; which, by your not delighting in him, you can never be sure to avoid,—for they are things common to men,—but which, by your delighting in him, you may be easily able to endure.

Besides all this, seriously consider, that you must die; you can make no shift to avoid that. How easily tolerable and pleasant will it be to think, then, of going to him, with whom you have lived in a delightful communion before! And how dreadful to appear before him, to whom your own heart shall accuse you to have been, against all his importunities and allurements, a disaffected stranger!

To these I add the consideration in the other part of the verse: “And he shall give thee the desire of thine heart.” By “desire,” it is plain we are to understand the thing desired, as is usual. By the thing desired, we must not be so unreasonable, as to think is meant any thing, whatsoever it be, that, even with the greatest extravagancy, we may set our hearts upon; as worldly possessions, riches, honours, &c. For it were most unbecoming, that delight in God should be so mercenary, or be propounded as the price of so mean things. Even, if the matter were so to be understood, delight in God were a

means to the attaining of these things as the end; which were to make the blessed God an inferior good to these. Nor can we suppose, that one who delights in God should ever esteem any reward or recompence of another kind, greater than what he finds in this very delight itself. Besides, we are very prone to desire things, that would prove hurtful to us. If God should gratify us with every thing we fancy, he should many times please us to our ruin. And do we believe, than when he hath won a person to place his delight and take pleasure in himself, he will requite him with a mischief?

Since then we may not understand Him to mean, that whatsoever we desire, if we delight in him, we shall have; we are to enquire further. And it is plain, the things that can be supposed to be desired by such persons as are here spoken to, must be of one of these two sorts: either things of a spiritual nature, that tend directly to the gratification and advantage of the inward man; or else external good things, that make for the support and comfort of this present life.

We will suppose it to be the one or the other of these; and shall shew that, whichsoever sort it be that is desired, delighting in God doth naturally infer the satisfaction of such desires.

1. Supposing they be spiritual good things that are desired, delight in God is most directly the satisfaction itself of such desire. Whatsoever purely spiritual good we can desire, is either God *himself*, or somewhat in order to Him. If it be *God himself* we desire, so far as we delight in him

we enjoy him, and have what we would have; and can only enjoy him more fully, by more entire and composed rest and delight in him. If it be somewhat in order to Him, He is still supremely and ultimately desired in that very desire; so that in delighting in him, we have our end, and that upon which this desire terminates. And, now, should not this be a great inducement to us to delight in God, that hereby our desires, the motions of our working hearts directed towards him, immediately find in him a peaceful and pleasant rest, and turn into a satisfying fruition?

2. Supposing the things we desire be those of an inferior kind; delight in God doth not a little to the satisfying of these desires also.

It doth not, as was said, entitle us to the things themselves we desire, whatever they be, or how unsuitable soever for us. But it moderates these desires, makes them sober, prudent, rational, and capable of being satisfied with what is fit for us. He that is much habituated to delight in God, is not apt to foolish extravagant desires. This is the sense of such a one, "Not my will, Lord, but thine be done." He may desire the same thing that others do, yet not with the same peremptory and precipitant desire, but with a desire tempered with submission, and with a reserved deference of the matter to the divine pleasure: "This thing, Lord, I desire, if thou shouldst see good." So that the general object of such a one's desire is only that which in the divine estimate is fit and good for him. And though he desire this or that particular thing, he desires it not as it is this

thing, but as supposing it possible this may be judged fit for him by the supreme wisdom, whereto he has referred the matter. But if it shall be judged otherwise, this thing falls without the compass of the general object of his desire, and in just construction he desires it not. For he desires it not otherwise, than on that condition that God sees it meet for him; and not longer than until he find, He does not. In which case the sobriety and submissiveness of his former desire appear in his cheerful patient want of the thing, which he finds God hath thought fit to deny him. So that even then, his desire is satisfied; that is, it doth not (as often it is with a carnal heart) turn, being crossed, into rage and madness; but into a complacential peace and rest in the divine will. He is satisfied in what God hath thought fit to do. The very thing is done which he would have done: God hath given him his heart's desire. For let the question be put to such a person, Do you desire such a thing though God judge it will be hurtful to you or unfit for you? No doubt, he will, not in faint words that have no sense under them, but from his very heart and soul say, No. And if he deliberate the matter of his own accord, or by any one's enquiry be occasioned to do so, this will be found the sense of his heart, and this would be his prayer in such a case, "Lord, if thy wisdom, which is infinitely more than mine, see this thing not fit, cross me, deny me in this desire of mine." And this general desire at least, which is the *measure* of the particular one, is sure to be ac-

complished to one that hath God for his delight. For the promise is express and cannot fail, All things shall work together for good, to them that love God.^a

This love to God, or delight in him, as it entitles such to that care and concern of God for them, which is expressed in this promise; so it doth in its own nature dispose their hearts to an acquiescence and satisfiedness therein. For love to God, where it is true, is supreme, and prevails over all other love to this or that particular good. Whence it cannot be, but, if this love be in act,—as the text must be understood to call to actual and exercised delight in God—it must subdue, and keep the heart so far subject to the divine good pleasure, that its desire and addictedness to this particular lesser good shall never be a matter of controversy and quarrel with Him who is, unquestionably, the Supreme and Universal Good. How will that one thought overcome, if such a one shall but apprehend God saying to him, “Dost thou love me above all things, and wilt yet contend with me for such a trifle!”

And as delight in God doth thus reduce and moderate desires in reference to any inferior good,—so that, if it be withheld, they admit a satisfaction without it, and the want of it is easily tolerable,—so, secondly, if it be granted, delight in God adds a satisfying sweetness to the enjoyment. A lover of God has another taste and relish, even

^a Rom. viii. 28.

of earthly good things, than an earthly-minded man can have. He hath that sweet savour of the love of God upon his spirit, that imparts a sweetness to all the enjoyments of this world, beyond what such things in their own nature have with them. This makes the righteous man's little, better than the great revenues of many wicked.^a

Upon the whole, therefore, this is, if duly weighed, a mighty and most persuasive argument to delight in God. For it imports thus much, which I add for a close to this discourse.

If you place your delight here, you are most certainly delivered from the vexation and torment of unsatisfied desire. The motions of your souls are sure to end in a pleasant rest. Your lesser desires will be swallowed up in greater, and all in the divine fulness; so that you will now say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" and "There is none on earth I desire beside thee."^b If you take no delight in God, your own souls will be a present hell to you. It may be, it is not enough considered, how much the future hell stands in unsatisfied desire; which desire—all suitable objects being for ever cut off from it—turns wholly to despair, rage, and torture. And that ravenous appetite, which would be preying upon external objects that now fail, turns inward, and, as an insatiable vulture, gnaws everlastingly the wretched soul itself.

^a Ps. xxxvii. 16.

^b Ps. lxxiii. 25.

The beginnings of this hell you will now have within you, while you refuse to delight in God. The sapless earthly vanities, upon which your hearts are set, give you some present content, which allays your misery for a little while, and renders it less sensible to you : but they have nothing in them to answer the vast desires of a reasonable immortal spirit. Whereby you certainly doom yourselves to perpetual distress. For in these false vanishing shadows of goodness you cannot have satisfaction, and in the blessed God you will not.

THE END.

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